

**BISMILLAH AR RAHMAN AR RAHIM**

*In the name of Allah,  
the Most Gracious, the Dispenser of Grace*





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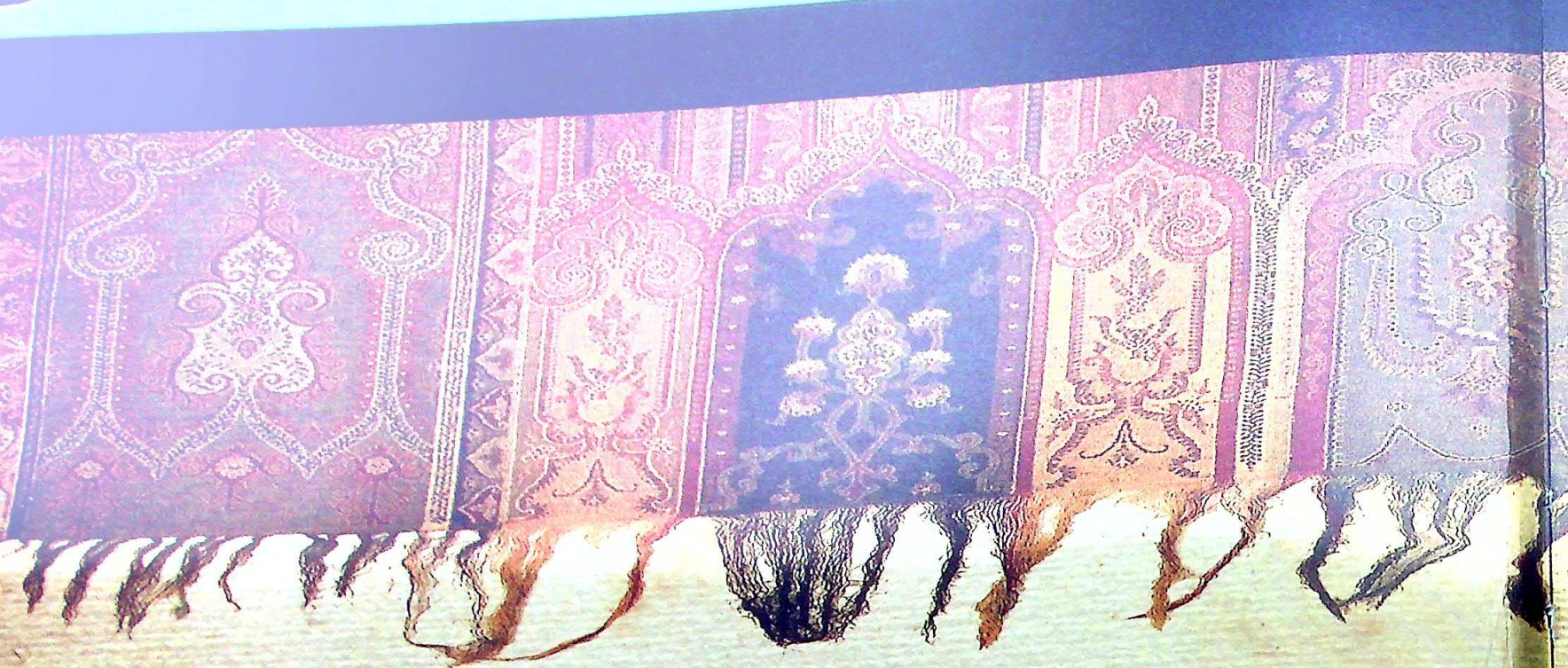
*The Sufi Way*

VOLUME 3

*Dedicated to*

THE SUFIS & RISHIS OF KASHMIR





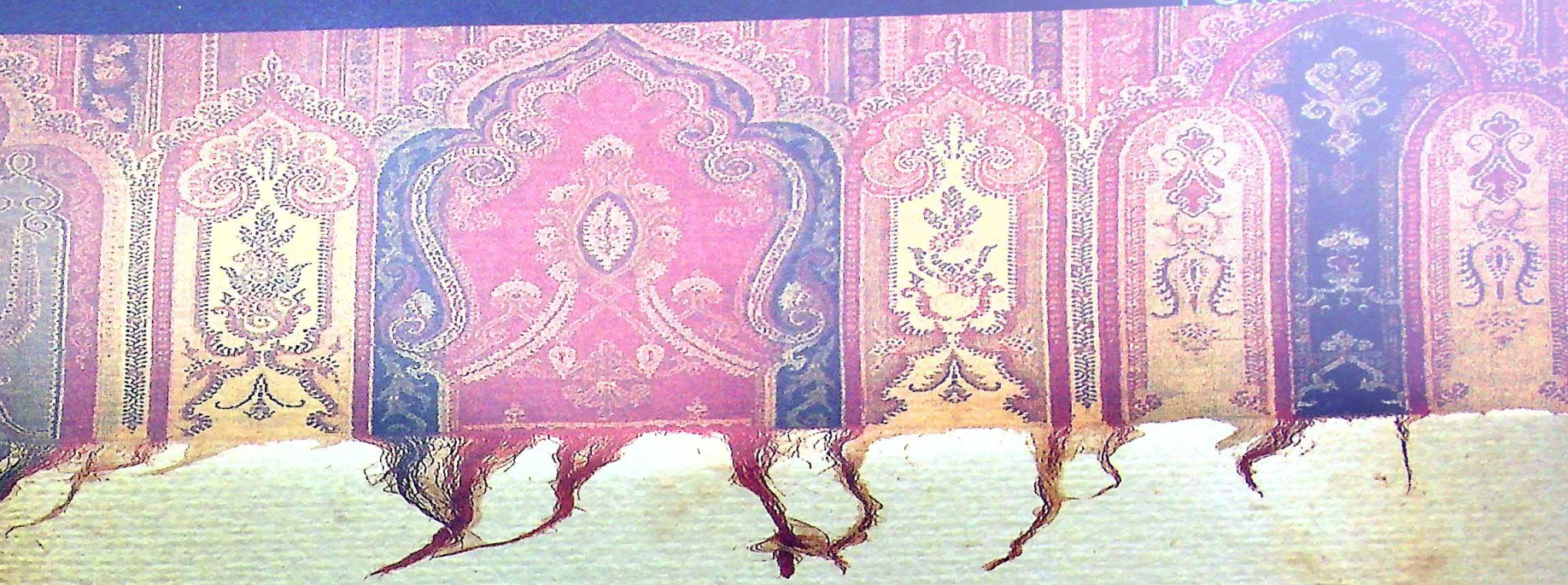
THIS THIRD ISSUE OF *HU* FOCUSES SPECIFICALLY UPON KASHMIR. DUE TO A COMBINATION OF ITS STUNNING NATURAL BEAUTY AND A VERY special geographical structure, the huge Kashmir Valley sits like a jewel in the Himalayas, and has always been a meeting place of the world's great religions. It is believed that some of the Vedic Rishis may well have expressed their spiritual exuberance in this area amidst the mountains that surround the Valley. Later, Kashmir became a major centre for Buddhism and the great Emperor Kanishka held the fourth international Buddhist Council there during the second century AD. Indeed, it was from Kashmir that Buddhism travelled to Ladakh, Tibet, Mainland China and finally on to Korea and Japan.

In the ninth century, there was a revival of Hinduism and the unique School of Kashmir Shaivism developed which is a very special branch of Hindu philosophy. The finest product of what came to be known as the Rishi movement was the great saint and poet Lalleshwari, also known as Lal Ded, in whose simple but profound Kashmiri poems is embedded the age-old wisdom of the *Upanishads*. Meanwhile, the Sufis from the West began entering Kashmir and the major figure in this was Sheikh Nuruddin Noorani, known as Alamdar-i-Kashmir, towards the end of the fourteenth century. He articulated Sufi Islam in his own language and is revered till today as the foremost Sufi saint in the Valley.

The shrine of Sheikh Nuruddin is in Charar-i-Sharif, a village about 25 km from Srinagar, and thousands of Kashmiris still flock there regardless of their religious affiliations. Indeed he is a beacon light of sanity and inclusiveness, in stark contrast to the fanatic and narrow-minded Islam that a section of the Mullahs and political leaders have been propagating. In addition, there are numerous other Sufi shrines in the Valley – the great mosque at Hazratbal that houses a hair of the Holy Prophet, the shrine of Maqdoom Sahib at the foot of the remarkable Hari Parbat mountain upon which the Hindu shrine of Sharika Bhagawati and the Chatti Patshahi Gurdwara are also located, as well as the shrine of Baba Rishi on the way to Gulmarg. These and other Sufi shrines have been a source of great comfort and courage to the Kashmiris who, through the cruel pages of history, have gone through long periods of suffering and dejection.

Although I am a Hindu, I have always held these shrines in high esteem and, ever since I became Sadar-i-Riyasat in 1952 at the age of 21, have made it a point from time to time to visit them along with my wife and pay my homage to the saints buried there. In this context three incidents particularly





stand out in my memory. The first was when the holy relic at Hazratbal disappeared in 1963 and the whole of the Valley was in turmoil. I was in Delhi at the time but flew back immediately to Srinagar and proceeded to Hazratbal despite the security warnings. Once I got there, I was overwhelmed by the deep affection that the people showed to me despite being in great anger. I said I would also pray for the return of the relic and, by God's grace, the relic indeed reappeared the next morning. Much later there was another episode in which some terrorists had holed up in Hazratbal. Again my wife and I drove there and the terrorists in fact indicated that they would like to speak to me, although the government at the time did not allow that to happen.

Then there was the traumatic experience when the ancient shrine of Charar-i-Sharif was burnt down by some terrorists from across the border. It created a typhoon of turmoil and anguish, but my wife and I decided that we would go there with a specially prepared *chadar* and lay it on the tomb of Alamdar-i-Kashmir which, miraculously, had survived the fire. We did so despite strong warnings from the State Government and did not carry any police escort with us. Once again I found that the people greatly appreciated our presence and we were able to lay the *chadar* and pay our homage. I am recounting these incidents simply to make the point that Sufism in Kashmir is by no means a narrow creed. The historic meeting between Lal Ded and Sheikh Nuruddin is part of legend, and the tradition of Interfaith harmony still remains deeply rooted in the psyche of the Kashmiri people.

The articles in this issue bring this out very clearly, and it is my sincere hope that the fragrance of Sufism will once more spread throughout the Valley. Recourse to violence and terrorism has brought nothing but death and destruction, particularly to the people of Kashmir, and has eroded the deep cultural and spiritual roots of Kashmiriat. This issue of *HU* is a modest attempt to recreate the spirit of Lal Ded and Nand Rishi (as Sheikh Nuruddin was also called). Indeed, such a development would be of great significance not only to Kashmir but also to the entire Islamic world.

*Karan Singh*

Dr Karan Singh  
President  
Rumi Foundation





KASHMIR IS CALLED RISHIWAER, A GARDEN OF SAINTS, AN ABODE OF MYSTICS, AND NOT A MERE PLAYGROUND OF THE ORIENT. It beckons people to come with a spiritual quest, with a search in the soul to experience this spirit of freedom.

It is this freedom of spirit that gave the people of the Valley their openness and adaptability to new thoughts and ideas. It gave them the power to coexist and hold on under severe conditions. This very quality was either a gift of nature, or heavily aided and inspired by nature. This spirit had produced spectacular and miraculous results. Whether it had been a way to reach a nearness to God or through Him, a nearness to human sensibilities. Whether it were ways of the remembrance of God by the Mystics or a mystical way of using thread by an anonymous artisan to create a mysterious effect of a Jamewar or carpet. Each experience was in its own way soulful and timeless. And this was the reason for my romance with Kashmir. During my stay there while making *Zooni*, in the late eighties, I realised that Kashmir gave without asking. It was a place for humility. People were full of love and gratitude. It was a place for giving and more giving. And this seemed easy because the moment you touched the soil of the Valley, you began to receive.

For nearly a decade I could not return there. But now, whenever I go to Kashmir, I meet people who begin to cry. They say that I was doing so much for them. Maybe I was, and it was all happening because of their own simplicity and beauty. Habba Khatoon was dear to them. She was one of their few links with the past which made them proud of being Kashmiri. I wanted to share this pride with the world by bringing people with ideas from all over who, with the grace of God, could change destinies. I wanted the world to look at Kashmir with understanding and respect for their culture. Whether it was during the building of the Sher e Kashmir International Convention Centre or the making of *Zooni* (based on the life of Habba Khatoon, the sixteenth century poetess-Queen of Sultan Yusuf Shah Chak) or the setting up of the Shah Hamadan Centre for Design Development in Barji, Harwan.

My experience of Kashmir has brought me close to God. Each experience may not be an entire success story but it has been complete in itself. There is no book in which the flavour of Kashmir has been recreated, no film in which its magic and mystery captured.



THIS ISSUE IS A TRIBUTE TO THESE MIRACLES AND SPECTACLES  
TO THE INSPIRATION AND THE INSPIRED. IT IS MY HUMBLE PRAYER  
THAT THIS SHOULD LAST TILL THE END OF TIME

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21-6-2012

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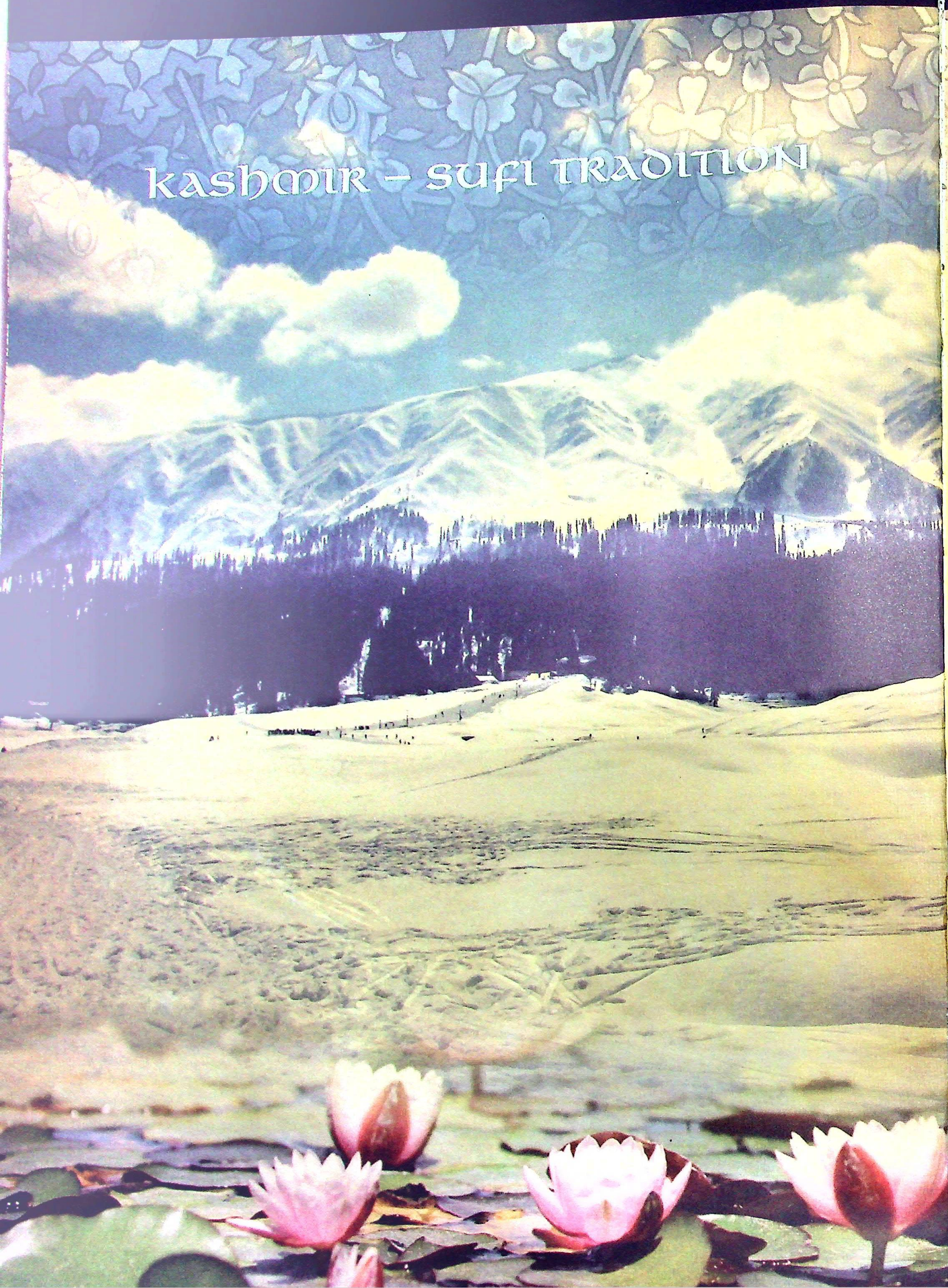
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# kashmir – sufi tradition





KASHMIR, DESCRIBED AS 'PARADISE ON EARTH' FOR ITS SCENIC BEAUTY AND SPLENDOUR, HAS FOR CENTURIES BEEN THE marketplace of inner Asia as well as a clearing house for ideas and thoughts. It has exhibited a remarkable willingness and capacity to absorb new ideas and thereby benefit through expansive knowledge and an all-inclusive intellectualism. It has, however, as a bedrock to its being and the civilisation it represents, maintained an abiding commitment and faith in humanism and tolerance in every sphere of human activity. The intellectual, spiritual and mystical personae have all fused into one entity and it is here that a philosopher is a saint and a poet. It is because of these philosopher-saint poets of Kashmir that the Valley was known as 'Reshwaer' and 'Pirwaer'. 'Waer' in Kashmiri stands for a garden like 'Kong-waer' or saffron garden.

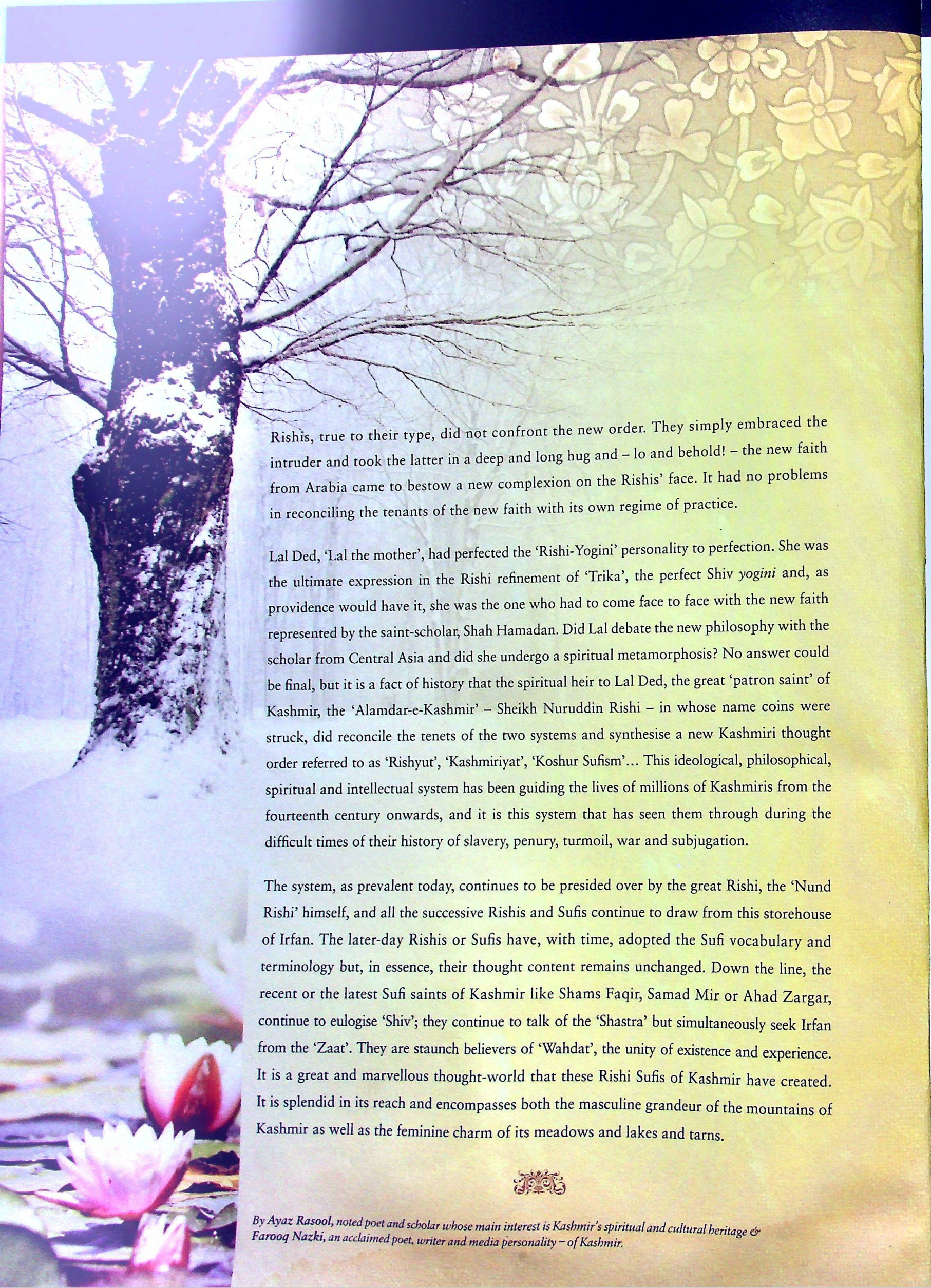
The Rishis of Kashmir are a distinct spiritual tribe, a unique genre, a totally different breed... perhaps from the beginning of human habitation in the Valley which, as the legend goes, was a vast expanse of water surrounded on all sides by huge mountains that – due to the *tapasya* of a Rishi, the Kashyap Rishi – experienced an upheaval with water getting drained off and land emerging in its place. The successive generations of Rishis spent their lives in search of 'truth'. They generally shunned the world, retired to the forests, ate whatever they could and did not raise families, but commanded great admiration, awe and respect by the general masses. They were strict followers of humanism, tolerance, brotherhood and non-violence. They planted trees so that the traveller could benefit from the shade. These Rishis developed a fabulous worldview of objects and events.

Life – in all its manifestations – came to be treated with respect and even green vegetables were considered sacrosanct for the life they housed and, therefore, could not be allowed to be boiled. This thought process had a lot to borrow from the existing religious beliefs of the times. 'Trika Shastra' – the refined form of a cumulative wisdom and thought – was an important ingredient in the Rishi thought. Matter and life were, though separable, one and interchangeable. The differences existed only in the degree of consciousness or being. 'Shakti' – or energy, was the all-pervasive, all-encompassing reason, cause, effect and result that could be experienced. The 'Parameshwara' was the single, whole, formless entity... everything flowed out of it and went back into it. The Rishis had an undeclared and undefined system that was practised, never prophesied. There was not much of jingoism or jargon attached to it. The whole thought system was, so to say, an exercise in silence.

With the advent of Islam, comparatively at a late stage in the life of the new faith from Arabia, the abstract Rishi thought persona came face to face with some real hard and definable attributes regarding – God, existence, judgement, vice, virtue, punishment and reward, ritual and custom.







Rishis, true to their type, did not confront the new order. They simply embraced the intruder and took the latter in a deep and long hug and – lo and behold! – the new faith from Arabia came to bestow a new complexion on the Rishis' face. It had no problems in reconciling the tenants of the new faith with its own regime of practice.

Lal Ded, 'Lal the mother', had perfected the 'Rishi-Yogini' personality to perfection. She was the ultimate expression in the Rishi refinement of 'Trika', the perfect Shiv *yogini* and, as providence would have it, she was the one who had to come face to face with the new faith represented by the saint-scholar, Shah Hamadan. Did Lal debate the new philosophy with the scholar from Central Asia and did she undergo a spiritual metamorphosis? No answer could be final, but it is a fact of history that the spiritual heir to Lal Ded, the great 'patron saint' of Kashmir, the 'Alamdar-e-Kashmir' – Sheikh Nuruddin Rishi – in whose name coins were struck, did reconcile the tenets of the two systems and synthesise a new Kashmiri thought order referred to as 'Rishyut', 'Kashmiriyat', 'Koshur Sufism'... This ideological, philosophical, spiritual and intellectual system has been guiding the lives of millions of Kashmiris from the fourteenth century onwards, and it is this system that has seen them through during the difficult times of their history of slavery, penury, turmoil, war and subjugation.

The system, as prevalent today, continues to be presided over by the great Rishi, the 'Nund Rishi' himself, and all the successive Rishis and Sufis continue to draw from this storehouse of Irfan. The later-day Rishis or Sufis have, with time, adopted the Sufi vocabulary and terminology but, in essence, their thought content remains unchanged. Down the line, the recent or the latest Sufi saints of Kashmir like Shams Faqir, Samad Mir or Ahad Zargar, continue to eulogise 'Shiv'; they continue to talk of the 'Shastra' but simultaneously seek Irfan from the 'Zaat'. They are staunch believers of 'Wahdat', the unity of existence and experience. It is a great and marvellous thought-world that these Rishi Sufis of Kashmir have created. It is splendid in its reach and encompasses both the masculine grandeur of the mountains of Kashmir as well as the feminine charm of its meadows and lakes and tarns.



By Ayaz Rasool, noted poet and scholar whose main interest is Kashmir's spiritual and cultural heritage & Farooq Nazki, an acclaimed poet, writer and media personality – of Kashmir.



**T**HAT GREAT GOD WAS ALWAYS HERE, AND WILL REMAIN HERE IN YEARS TO COME. SO, YOU SHOULD HAVE PINNED YOUR FAITH IN HIM ALONE. YOUR ALL MISGIVINGS WILL BE DISPELLED BY HIM ONLY. THEREFORE, O MY LIFE, STRIVE HARD TO RECLAIM LOST MOMENTS!

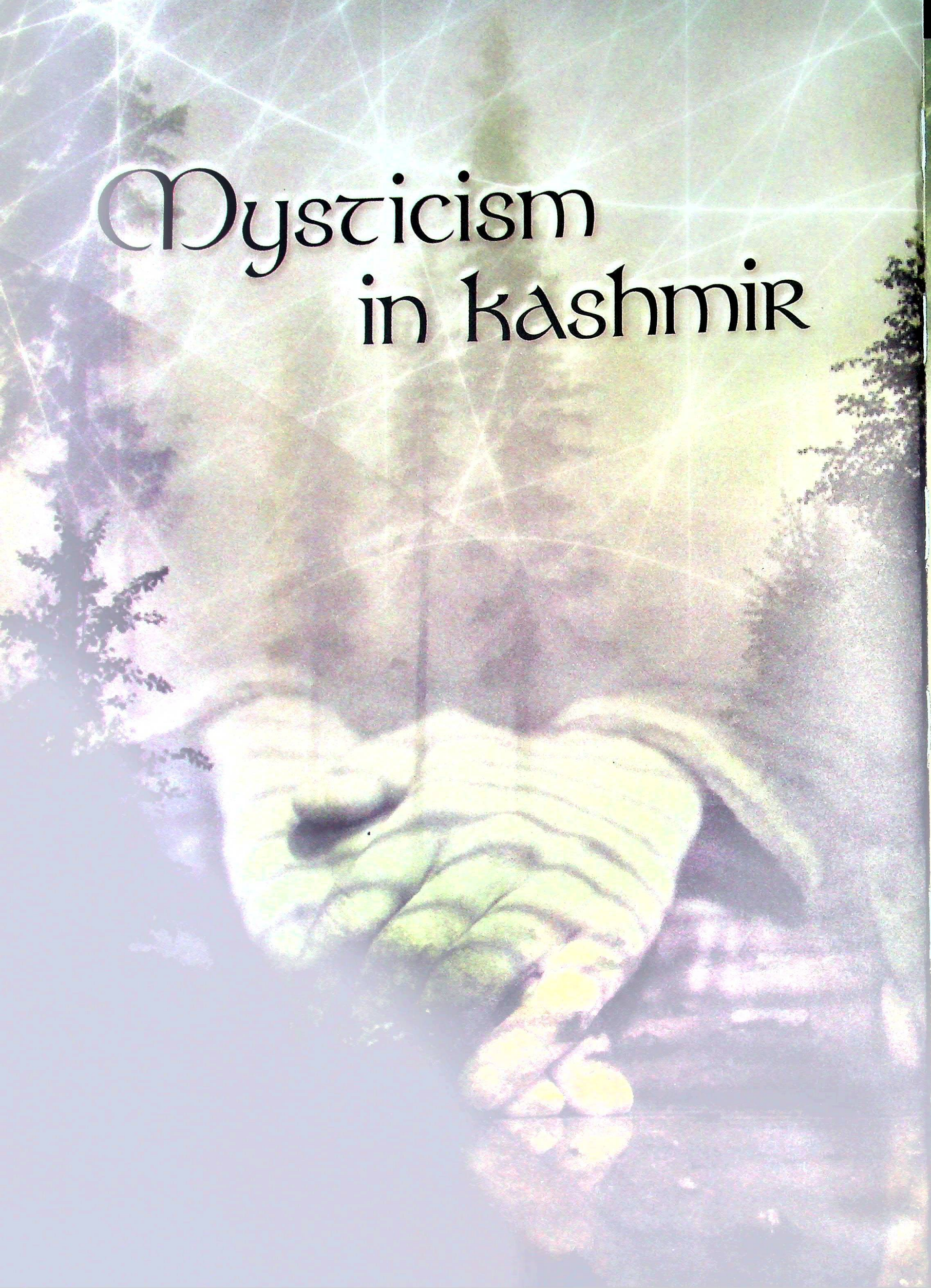
**W**HEN IT WAS TIME TO AWAKE TO ACTIVITY, I PREFERRED UNFORGIVABLE INDOLENCE TO IT. WHEN, AT LAST, I COULD COLLECT MY TOOLS TO GET ON TO MY WORK, IT WAS VERY LATE AND OUT OF SEASON. I DID, AT LENGTH, REALISE WITH AN ACHING HEART, THAT MOMENTS LOST COULD NOT BE RETRIEVED; A REMORSEFUL PAIN ENGULFED ME. ON THE HEELS OF MY PENITENCE, CALL FROM DEATH CAME, BIDDING ME TO RESPOND TO IT AT ONCE.

**W**HEN AT THE CONCLUSION OF MY PENANCE I PERCEIVE YOU, IN ESSENCE, WITHIN MY OWN SELF, THEN NO WORLDLY ENTICEMENTS CAN ENCHAIN ME. I SHALL FEEL, AS IF, THE FOG OF IGNORANCE HAS MELTED AWAY, AND THE AFFLICTIONS RELEVANT TO THE WORLD HAVE COMPLETELY BEEN MASTERED BY ME. HENCE, O GREAT GOD, BANISH MY SINS!

**I**F NOT FACE TO FACE, YET THROUGH YOUR INDISCERNIBLE GRACE, DO KEEP A VIGILANT WATCH OVER MY THOUGHTS. DO FERRY ME ACROSS THIS OCEAN OF TRANSITORY LIFE, WITHOUT MAKING A SHOW OF IT. WHO ELSE EXCEPTING YOU WILL LEND SYMPATHETIC EAR TO MY PLAINTS. THEREFORE, O GOD, DO AWAY WITH MY VICES.



# Mysticism in kashmir





## MYSTIC DISCIPLINE HAS PROVED TO BE THE BEDROCK OF ALL SPIRITUAL ORDERS IN ALMOST EVERY THEISTIC SCHOOL OF THOUGHT

and Kashmir, with its glorious contribution to meditative thinking had, long before the advent of Islam, passed through the 'Trika' monism and Buddhistic Catholicism to attain maturity and potency in spiritual evolution. Muslim mysticism, from the fourteenth century to this day, saturated this trend with new vigour and verve and coherent direction and purpose, with the result that the collective behaviour of the Kashmiris was moulded on a distinct pattern down from Lal Ded to this day – a unique phenomenon having very few parallels in the history of Asian nations.

The historians of Muslim mysticism have traced its origin from the very life of Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him), and it is an established fact that the Ashab-e-Suffia, a group from amongst the Prophet's companions, were the first trainees in the mystic discipline initiated by Islam. Some historians further say that the puritanical theocracy of the four orthodox Caliphs was, in effect, the manifestation of the basic principle of mysticism – piety – that has remained the pivot of all the fourteen mystic schools in Islam. When the Calliphate was changed into Umayyed Kingdom, the reaction against this political trickery and, subsequently, the moral lapses of the Abbaside feudalism, accelerated the 'search for the Real'. A host of pious puritanical Muslims such as Taus Yemani, Maroof-e-Karkhi, Ibn-e-Musabbib and Malik Ibn Dinar revolted against the 'wordliness' of the rulers and the ignorance of the masses. From amongst the galaxy of 'divines', Hasn-e-Basri is credited to have attempted the first systematic approach to the intuitional school of mysticism, though Ibn-e-Hashim of Damascus is reported to be the first mystic who was actually called a Sufi. In the course of time, the ardent devotion of Ibrahim Adham, the divine love of Rabiaa Basriya, the Gnosticism of Junaid and Dhunn Noon and the self-annihilation theory of Bayazid and Hallaj, enriched the mystic trends till their climax in Ibn-e-Arabi's theoretical compendium *Futuh-e-Makiya*, the symbolical exposition in Maulana Rumi's *Mathnavi* and Mirza Akmal-ul-Din's *Bahrul Irfan* (this last one being written in Kashmir).

## FUSION OF VEDANTA AND SUFISM

When the mystic lore was flowering in various countries under the Islamic rule, non-Arab concepts such as Aryan pantheism, Buddhist self-abnegation, Christian asceticism and Zoroastrian polarity of light and darkness were so imperceptibly creeping in, synthesised and developed in Muslim mysticism, that it would be next to impossible to sift its Arab and non-Arab elements when Hazrat Bulbul Shah and Mir Syed Ali Hamadani came to preach Islam in Kashmir.

It was a strange coincidence of events that Lal Ded (b. 1335) had begun the mystical muse on indigenous traditions exactly when the first group of Muslim missionary mystics reached Kashmir. According to the majority of historians – the latest two being Pandit J. L. Kaul and A. K. Rehbar – Lalla was strongly influenced by Islam and, in consequence, proved to be the precursor of that culture and religious fusion which took place in Kashmir between the ancient spiritual heritage of the *Vedanta* and the new Sufi tradition of Islam (J. L. Kaul), represented by the Rishi order of Muslim saints.



Her *naakh* (from the Sanskrit word *naakya*) poetry in Kashmiri is replete with the mystic vision. It was, however, not the abstruse philosophical truths or even the discipline of Kundalini and Nala-Bindu Yoga that made her a poet-saint of the people. It was rather the sincerity of faith, the stamp of intensity of her mystic experience and the authenticity of her poetic expression – revealed by an energy of idiom and homely tolerance, compassion and brotherhood of all – that made her so. The common folk were as if bewitched with the message of love carried to every obscure village by Sheikh Nuruddin Rishi and his followers.



*The lover is he who burns with love  
Whose self doth shine like gold  
When man's heart lights up with flames of love  
Then shall he reach the infinite.*



Side by side with this movement, the mystics of Kubravi and Suhrawardy orders, represented by Syed Ali Hamadani and Sheikh Hamza Makhdoom Kashmiri, guided the metaphysical impulses and mundane affairs of the Kashmiris with one major difference with the Rishis. These preferred to renounce worldly joys whereas the later two orders coordinated the human conduct on such a path where Satan had no say; where, in the words of Shah Hamadan, we could ejaculate: 'O Lord, despite our Gnosticism, we have not recognised You, for even when we are illuminated with mystic light, He, as infinite being, cannot be grasped by the finite human consciousness.' The Naqsh-bandi and Qadri orders represented by Khawaja Khawand Mehmood and Mir Nazuk Qadri respectively, also added their quota to the mystic culture of Kashmir; and it will be too long a study to summarise, even in a sketchy form, how the saints and scholars of these orders moulded not only the psychic trends, but the very mode of life 'in times of joy and sorrow'.

In Kashmir, unfortunately, the Brahmanic cult of race superiority did not die out in some sections even after the continuous efforts by the Kashmir mystics to eradicate it. Hence, in the course of time, all the shrines of saints became dens of parasitical Mutawalis, Babas and Pirs, pestering visitors and hoodwinking the folk. That is why it appears almost impossible to convince a foreigner of our spiritual heritage in the mystic domain, unless he finds respite enough to study our mystic literature, produced in the Sanskrit, Persian and Kashmiri languages. The tradition of religious tolerance, Catholic outlook, indifference to the dictates of dirty politics and a sense of fraternity – all engendered by our mystics – was continuously carried further by the saint-poets of the Kashmiri language with one difference – the Hindu mystics such as Srikanth, Sahab Kaul and Permanand, derived their symbols and allusions from the Hindu scriptures, whereas the Muslim mystics such as Momin Sahib, Haqqani and Assad Paray based their diction on the Persian interpretation of the mystical vision. It will not be out of place to quote the definition of Yoga. It says:

'The practice of yoga does not require a person to renounce his hearth and home and to fly away from his social obligations, but it requires him to renounce the evil ways, and to do his duties righteously while remaining in the consciousness of God. This purity, soul consciousness and linkage with God – these are the three essential requisites of yoga.'



For God  
W



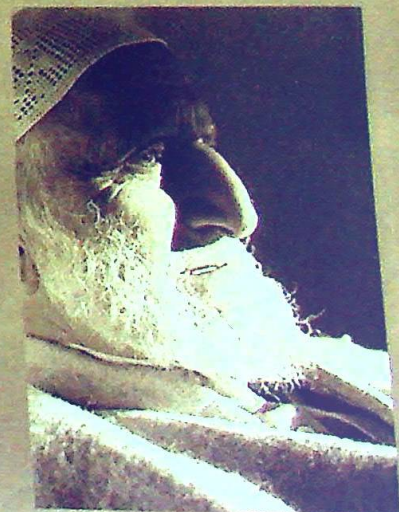
## SUFISM – A UNIVERSAL RELIGION

And this is exactly what has been preached by our Sufi poets like Ahmad Batwari, Sochhi Kral and Shams Faqir. They have been telling us that Sufi-ism is a universal religion because it does not believe in rituals.

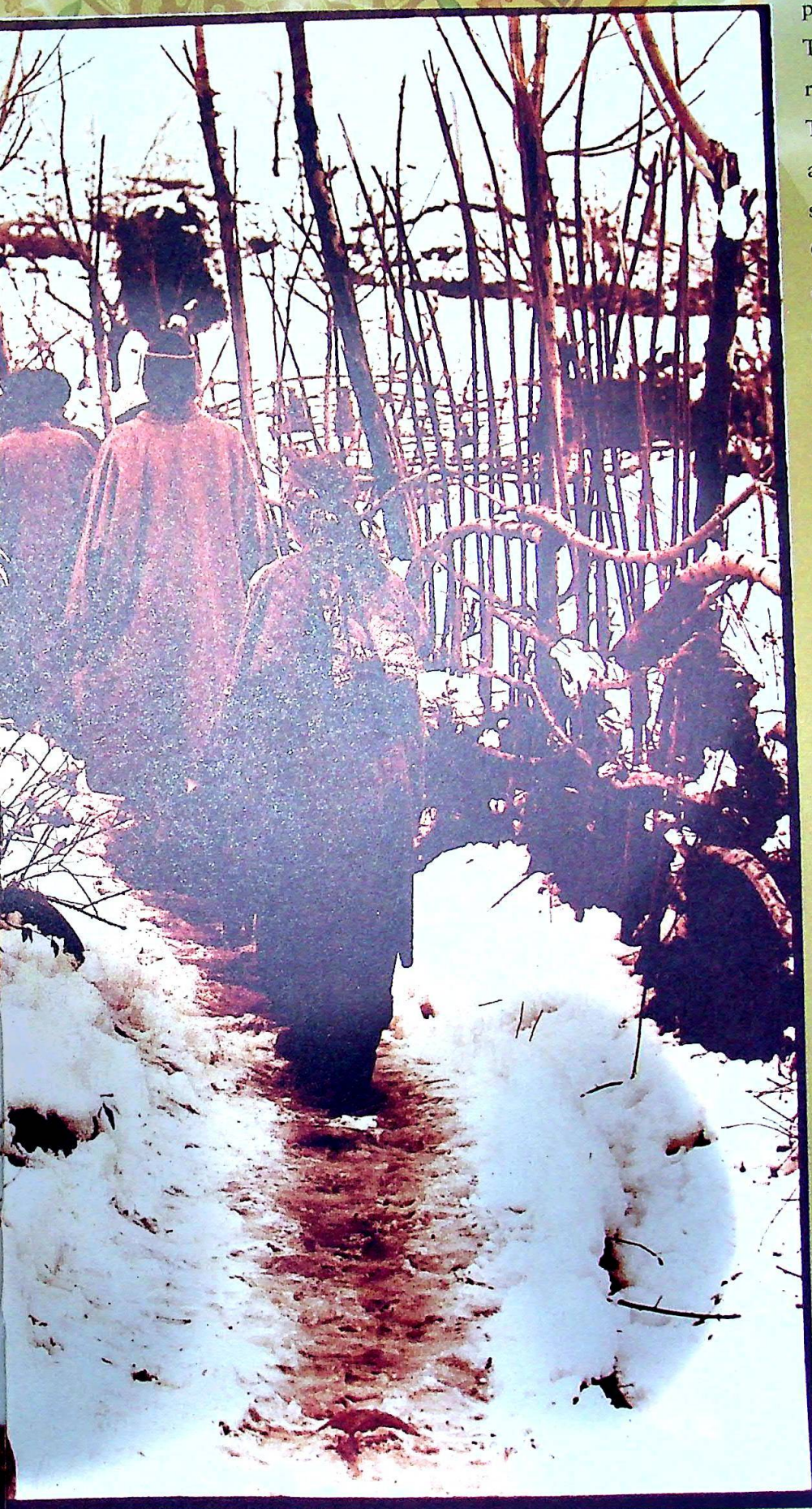
The people of Kashmir have been living up to these teachers and that is why, even in this material age, we have common shrines, common names and common heritage in Kashmir. One of our folklores sung by our women on the occasion of festivities like Id is *'Adam had two sons, one was cremated and the other buried.'* Nevertheless, there is a long chain of poets who synthesised the two schools so harmoniously so as to provide a new amalgam of indigenous mysticism – Khawaja Habibullah Nowsheri, Shah Qalander, Rahim Sahib, Roopa Bawani and, finally, the 'prince of the mystical poets' Shams Faqir (1843-1904) who kept the torch illuminated – with the result that even in the modern materialistic age we have Master Zinda Kaul, Ahad Zargar and Samd Mir, whose contributions to mystical lore and thought have proved creative enough to derive applause from all critics of the subject.

In conclusion, it will be pertinent to refer to what Plotinus wrote centuries back:

"There are great highways which connect to the exalted abode of the actual and the particular, where we stand in the immediate presence of the infinite who shines out as from the deep of the soul." Kashmiris have stood the test of this inner light even in the darkest days of their history, simply because their mystics have guided their psyche on the right track.



By Ghulam Rasool Nazki (1910-1998), a multi-dimensional scholar who mastered command over seven languages. He was a true Sufi moulded in the Rumi tradition and enriched by the local Rishi culture of Kashmir.

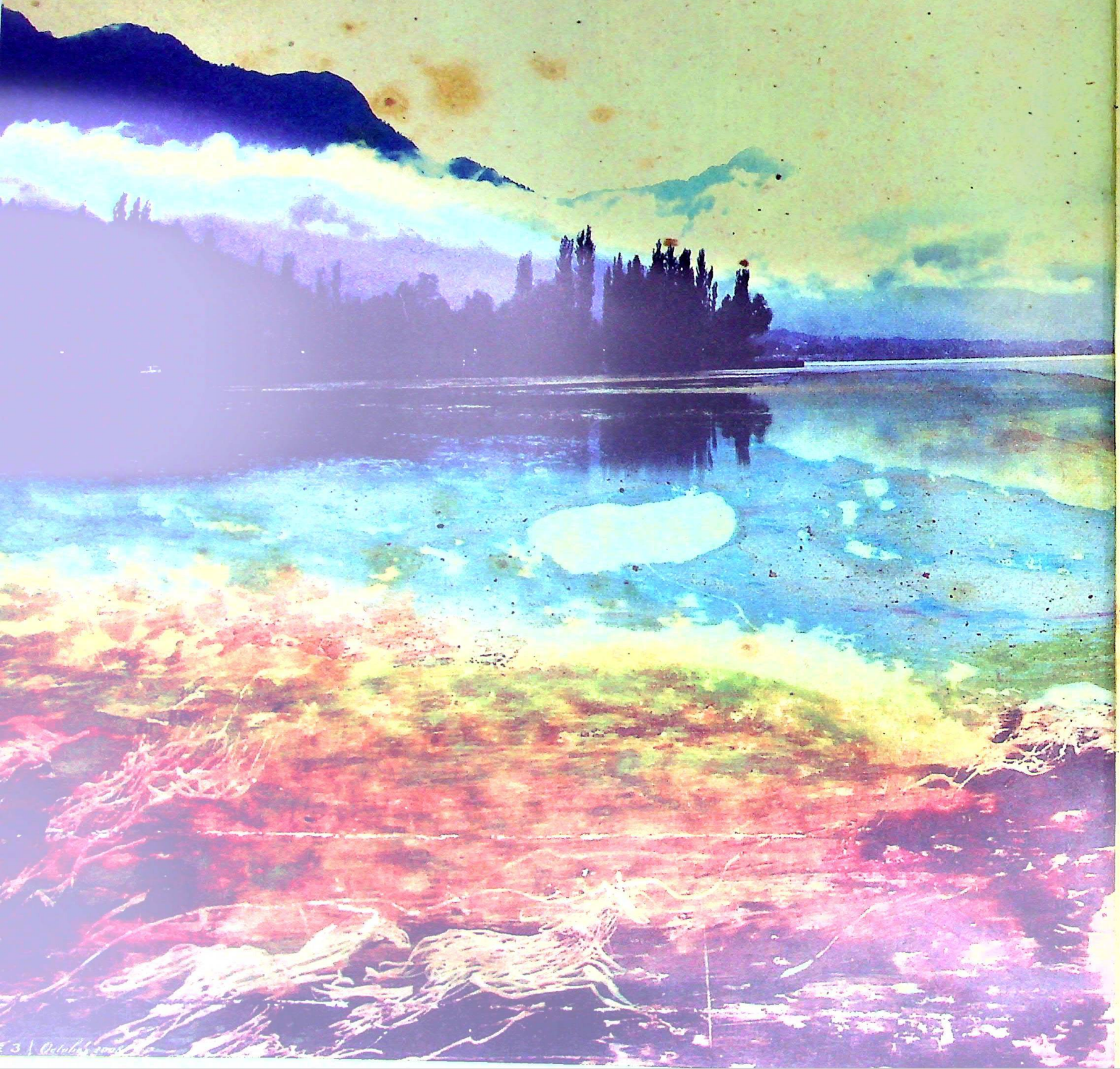


God is love's luminous flame within the heart

Whose His abode in love when man was made, and love his dwelling found,  
When grief was great, in the heart of the sorrowing man. (Zinda Kaul)



THE STORY OF  
*Irika Shashtra*





EVOLVED THROUGH MANY CENTURIES IN THE ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL TIMES OF HISTORY AS AN ELABORATE SYSTEM OF religio-philosophy, Kashmir Shaivism is better known in the Valley as Trika Shastra (Three-fold Science) or simply Trika (Triad).

No philosophy was ever born in the mind of any single individual. All systems of thought have gradually evolved through long periods in the minds of men belonging to successive generations and, at a proper time, assumed definite shape. Although the school of Kashmir Shaivism was founded in the ninth century by Vasugupta, traces of the philosophy can be detected in the literature produced quite early dating back to the pre-Christian era.

In his famous history, *Rajatarangini*, Kalhana records the construction of temples and other places of worship dedicated to Shiva in his various forms during the days long before the advent of Buddhism. Some research scholars have read the cardinal principles of Shaivism in the cuneiform signs on clay tablets of the Sumerian King-Priest, Gudea. It may or may not be a reliable discovery but it seems plausible that in remote antiquity, some sages were acquainted with the basic formulations of Shaivism. In his work *Shiv Drishti*, Somananda, who lived in the second half of the ninth century, narrates in outline the story of Trika. This is the earliest account of its traditional history. Somananda claims that the philosophy was first formulated twenty generations (or roughly eight hundred years) before him. He tells us about great intellectuals who contributed to the evolution of the Trika philosophy before it was presented by Vasugupta in a terse and well-defined form only a hundred years before his own birth.

In the beginning, however, Shaivism was nothing more than a simple religious cult with some dogmas and tenets in which its followers evinced complete faith. It took a long period of evolution before Trika assumed the final shape in which it is known today.

### MEETING GROUND OF DIFFERENT CULTURES

Because of its geographical position as a central place surrounded by lands of different races, Kashmir has been, from time immemorial, a meeting ground of various peoples and diverse cultures. Seeds of thought arrived from the four directions and, mingling together in the fertile soil, grew into beautiful plants bearing fragrant flowers of variegated colour. For over a thousand years in the pre-Muslim period, the Valley was recognised in the Hindu world as a seat of learning, drawing hundreds of students from all parts of India as well as from lands known as Afghanistan and Central Asia, for the study of poetics, music, mathematics, religion, astronomy, philosophy and other subjects.



## THE THREE SCHOOLS

In the pre-Buddhistic age, Shaivism had emerged from its primitive stage and assumed a philosophical complexion. Three eminent teachers, Tryambaka, Amardaka and Srinatha, divided the Shaivagamas into three classes according as they taught monism, dualism or monism-cum-dualism which had been adumbrated respectively. Thus there had come into existence three Shaiva Tantric schools, each known by the name of the three thinkers.

In the third century BC, Ashoka conquered the Valley and annexed it to his vast empire. He introduced Buddhism among the subjugated people and, with the support of local Naga intellectuals, succeeded in undermining Brahmanism. Soon the new faith became very popular and Buddhist philosophy dominated the political, intellectual and social life of the Kashmiris.

However, the ancestral religion could not be uprooted; its memories lingered on during the whole period of Buddhist supremacy. When with the change of time, staunch adherents of Brahmanism regained power, they tried to revive the old traditions and re-establish ancient schools of thought. This caused an intellectual upheaval followed by a clash of two religious philosophies basically different to each other. To resolve the tension, the mighty thinkers of the age, exercising their faculty of creative thought, evolved a new philosophy of life – this is 'Trika', a synthesis of the fundamental doctrines of Indian philosophies plus the knowledge gained by the Kashmiri thinkers through their own contemplation, observation and experience.





### GENESIS OF TRIKA

Historian-philosopher Kshemaraja mentions the immediate cause of the founding of Trika. According to him, there prevailed in the Valley two mutually conflicting systems of thought in the eighth century. One of them led by a Buddhist teacher Naga-Bodhi and his well-disciplined band taught nihilist doctrines; they earned the sobriquet of 'Nastikanam Purasara' (front rank leaders of nihilists) and 'Atmeshvara Nirodhaka' (repellers of *atman* and *Ishvara*). Opposed to them were the 'Naresbharabhedavadina', the adherents of the dualistic system holding man and God eternally different from each other. Kshemaraja says that the dust raised by the recurrent clashes of the zealots belonging to the two schools, concealed the monistic mysteries of Shaivism and endangered its existence. It was in these circumstances that Vasugupta came forward arraigning both the schools as incomplete and misguided. He propounded *Shiv Sutras*, a compendium in which the truths of monistic idealism were succinctly adumbrated in a scholarly fashion.

### VASUGUPTA PROPOUNDS SHAIVA DOCTRINES

Before Vasugupta gave Shaivism a final form by which it is now known, the philosophy was heavily influenced by Sankhya and Buddhism; it was inclined towards materialist views. Some scholars believe – and it is confirmed by *Shankardigvijay* – that the great revivalist philosopher Shankaracharya visited the Valley in the second decade of the ninth century during the course of his all-India tour. He was instrumental in effecting a basic change in the Shaiva philosophy, making it more theistic in outlook and prone to Vedanta. It was soon after this that Vasugupta gave his *Shiv Sutras* to the world.

An amusing account has been given by a disciple of Vasugupta about the origin of *Shiv Sutras*. It is said when the great master, perturbed by the blatant assertions of the nihilists and the dualists, passed restless days and sleepless nights, Shiva, taking pity on the devotee, appeared to him in a dream and revealed the whereabouts of the 'Shiv Sutras'; they were, he was told, inscribed on a rock near Harwan at the foot of the Mahadeva hill where Vasugupta lived. On waking up the blessed Brahmin lost no time in going to the spot, in copying out the text and in propounding the doctrines. The rock known as 'Shankar pal' has been located by modern antiquarians with the help of the hoary tradition, but the inscription is no more traceable on it. One wonders if anything in the nature of the inscription ever appeared on the rock.

Kshemaraja, it may be noted, gives a different story. He records that there is no truth in the statement that the 'Shiv Sutras' were found inscribed on the rock; these were, according to him, revealed to Vasugupta in a dream by Shiva himself. Whatever the fact, it is beyond controversy that *Shiv Sutras* laid the foundation of Trika Shastra, the monistic Shaiva philosophy of Kashmir. However, Vasugupta gave barely the most cardinal principles of the philosophy. It was left to his disciples, the most famous of whom was Kallata, to spread their knowledge by producing explanatory treatises on them.



## BASIC PRINCIPLES OF TRIKA

As the name indicates, Trika Shastra deals with three objects namely – Man, the Universe, the principle that keeps on restoring order, equilibrium and harmony that are disturbed by constant change. Trika has also been described by certain writers as standing for – the subject of experience, the experience, the object of experience.

Some other writers hold that the Shastra stands for – Shiva (Supreme Being), Shakti (His Power), Nara (Man). Still others think that it refers to three views of Reality namely – the dual (*bheda*), the non-dual (*abheda*), the dual-non-dual (*bedabheda*).

For the reasons given above, Trika has much in common with the Advaita Vedanta. But Kashmiri philosophers have persistently refused to get totally swayed by the teachings of Shankara. The Trika has retained its individuality; it does not believe in the infallibility or the eternity of the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*, nor does it deny the objective reality of the universe. The attitude is analogous to that of the Sankhya system and Buddhism from which Kashmir Shaivism has inherited a good deal of its beliefs. The propounders of Trika give first place to reason and experience in their discussions and only a secondary place to the authority of the scriptures. Unlike the Vedanta, the Trika holds that the world we see is real because it is a manifestation of Parameshwara and, therefore, it is one aspect of Reality. Nothing can exist outside Parameshwara and no appearance can therefore be unreal or illusory. *Mayavad* of Shankara is not acceptable to the teachers of the Trika.

In Trika, spirit and matter are not two different things but are, fundamentally, one in two different forms. Spirit is matter and matter is not inert as is commonly believed. Being a form of the spirit, it is of conscious character; only there exist variations of consciousness of the spirit within it. Differences between what we call living and non-living pieces of matter are nothing but those of degrees of consciousness. It follows from this process of thinking that life and matter are basically one; either can acquire the other state.

Trika believes in one reality – the Unity that pervades the whole universe of animate and inanimate objects. It is defined as Parama Shiva, the universal consciousness, which is self-luminous and illuminates all that exists in

the universe whether in the living or the non-living form. Every thing emanates from this effulgence and ultimately merges into it. This reality has two aspects – ‘Prakash’ (light) and ‘Vimarsh’ (thinking); one is the being and the other awareness of the being. Prakash is what exists and Vimarsh the awareness of the existence of what exists.

## PHILOSOPHY OF CHANGE

Change is the first law of the universe, declares Trika; body, mind and spirit are subject to alteration from moment to moment; nothing remains static for even a fraction of time. But unaffected by this process is the consciousness which is eternal and the one witness of all that is undergoing the ceaseless change. It is described by Trika as the nuclear core of the ‘Atman’. The changeless witness of the changing body, mind and spirit as well as the universe, is no other than Shiva, the All Powerful Lord who has no one above Him nor any one to second Him. The only reality is Shiva who is immutable, indestructible and infinite consciousness. He has many other attributes like omnipresence and formlessness, but unrestricted independence is very peculiar to him.

The miseries and sufferings of man are caused by his ignorance. He identifies himself with body, mind or spirit or worse still, with property owned by him. So long as he does this, he cannot be happy nor enjoy the spiritual bliss to which he is otherwise entitled. “Our bondage is due to our ignorance,” declares *Shiva Sutras*. “Though the soul is infinite consciousness, man thinks ‘I am finite’,” observes Kaishemendra in his commentary on *Shiva Sutras*. “Though independent, he thinks ‘I am a finite body’.” “The man forgets that the world has existence only in Shiva and that the soul is identical with the Lord.



The aim of Trika Shastra is to awaken man with the knowledge that the Atman, the witness, is no other than Shiva – the All Powerful Lord of the Universe.”

While synthesising the previous systems of the Indian philosophy, Kashmir thinkers sedulously discarded the barren parts represented by negativism, escapism and unemotionalism of the Upanishadic Vedanta. Even the existence of the promoting cause, Karma, or a material cause, Prakriti, is not acknowledged. Shiva is absolutely free and creates all that exists under the influence of desire by the mere force of His will. He makes the world appear in a mirror. God is unaffected by objects of His creation as the mirror is by the images reflected in it. (*Indian Philosophy* by Dr Radhakrishnan, vol. ii, p. 732.) Shiva is Bhairava (the Terrible) and also Kala (Time Destroyer); at the same time He is the deep-rooted instinct – Love.



## ABSOLUTE MONISM

Trika philosophy is characterised by absolute monism, depth of thought and originality. As has been tersely put: “Shiva is the subject, the experience as well as the experienced.” (*Spanda Karika*) Essentially, it is an idealist philosophy unrelenting in its analysis and logic, but it does not shirk realism, the objective reality of the world – it is eclectic in nature, a fusion of all that is abiding in the Vedanta, the Sankhya, the Vaisheshika, the Nyaya and the Vinaya of Buddha. It also contains the core of Vaishnava and Shakta teachings, especially the gospel of supreme love and an all-absorbing devotion for the beloved. But Trika is against vulgarisation of the inner sentiment; it has no use for self-mortification and asceticism as a way to self-realisation, so common among many Hindu sects. It believes in living a purposeful life. In the words of Rabindranath Tagore, “Trika Shastra has penetrated into that living depth of thought where diverse currents of human wisdom unite in a luminous synthesis.”

Having described Reality, the propounders of Trika next laid down the means (*upayas*) of liberation from human bondage. Briefly stated, they are four in number – first is ‘Anandopaya’ which consists of the special grace of Parameshvara; the second is ‘Ichchopaya’ – strong will of the individual to be free by destroying false desires and acquiring true knowledge; ‘Saktopaya’, the third recommends yogic practices and the last ‘Upaya’ believes in religious observances such as meditation, the constant utterance of God’s name and other such pleasant practices which do not have repressive or suppressive elements in them.

It is notable that these means are open to all human beings without any distinction of sex, creed, caste or colour. Indeed, it is stressed that women attain liberation more speedily than men by the same means. Trika repeatedly forbids the suppression of any thought in opposition to its own.



By Prem Nath Bazaz (1905-1984) who was a prominent freedom fighter in Kashmir. He was a reputed journalist and an original thinker, known for his principles.



THE ECSTASY OF  
*Lia Dea*





**AMONG THE MANY SAINTS, POETS AND MYSTICS OF KASHMIR,** LAL DED OR LALLA, AS SHE IS LOVINGLY CALLED, IS HIGHLY REVERED and respected. She was a poet, a sufi, a yogi and an ardent devotee of shiva. Some people even consider her shiva's *avatar*. Most Kashmiris have the sayings of Lalla on the tip of their tongue. The Kashmiri language is full of her verse sayings or *vaakhs*. Kashmiri Hindus and Muslims also call her 'Mother Lalla' or 'Granny Lalla' and she is also known as 'Lallayogeshwari'.

Lal Ded was born in the second decade of the fourteenth century in Pandrethan to a Kashmiri Pandit family. The exact year of her birth is not known. It is believed that the family priest taught her some religious texts; he has been identified as a learned scholar and *yogic* practitioner, Siddha Srikanth. He is the one to whom she refers in her *vaakhs* – sometimes asking him questions, sometimes playfully pointing out his inadequacies as a spiritual mentor.

When Lalla was twelve years old, she was married off in a family from Pampore; they gave her the name Padmavati. There are many stories of how cruelly she was tormented by her mother-in-law. The Kashmiri language abounds in proverbs connected with Lal Ded's legendary patience, wisdom, deep insight and spiritual power. The best known story of her life concerns the forbearance with which she put up with her mother-in-law who never gave her enough to eat. She would put a stone on Lalla's *thaal* and then cover it with rice, so that people got the impression that Lalla had a mound of rice. Consequently, she spent many hungry nights, but never complained.


When Lalla was twenty-six, she renounced her marital home and became a devotee of Shiva; she became a disciple of Guru Siddha Srikanth and began to move with *sadhus* and *pirs*. It is said that she went about naked and when quizzed about it she answered, "I have yet to encounter a man." One day, she saw the great Sufi saint Shah Hamadan. It was then that she hid her nakedness and spoke the words: "I saw a man, I saw a man."

Lalla's *vaakhs* deal with everything in life – from *yoga* and God to *dharma* and *atma*. Her riddles are on the lips of every Kashmiri. Her poetry has given the Kashmiri language a richness of phrase and metaphor. Hers is timeless poetry, understood by people in their own light, according to their own intellectual levels. The direct appeal of her words reached peasant, priest and prince; by word of mouth her verses travelled throughout the region and became embedded in the local idiom.


The exact date of Lalla's death is not known, but it is claimed that she died in Bijbehara. She has two hundred sayings.




In the fourteenth century, it was rare to come across a woman writing in any language. In Kashmiri, Lalla was an exception. She spoke directly to the people and what they heard they recorded, hence ensuring that her words survived. She was regarded as a prophetess, moral guide and a source of practical wisdom. Her words fitted daily occasions. Lalla's message – couched in quatrains called 'vaakhs' – is very simple and straightforward. It is actually an exhortation for self-cognition.




*Abuse and spit I wore like a crown,  
Slander followed or preceded my steps;  
But Lal I am, never swerved from my goal  
My being suffused with God, where is the room for these.*




These words gain deeper meaning as the years go by. As a woman I identify with Lal Ded as do millions like me who have, in a patriarchal world, struggled to chart our own path and destiny. Lalla embodies the spirit of the quintessential woman whose marriage was doomed from the very beginning because she dared to steer an independent course. But rather than allow this treatment to turn her into an object of pity, she rose from the depths of suffering and humiliation to become a woman empowered. Her mystic poetry set in motion a cultural, linguistic, social and religious revolution. She used her vocabulary from common everyday life with words and expressions being drawn from a woman's world of domesticity. Her poetry is manifestly a woman's work and, in the process, she gives a voice to women.




*In love's mortar I pounded and ground my heart-  
Evil passions fled and I was at peace-  
Roasted and burnt and consumed it myself,  
Yet know not whether I die or live*



In another *vaakh* she uses the images of a lowly boatman and a humble potter to convey her thought. There are three metaphors here – the first is of the inept human trying to tow a boat on the sea with an untwisted rope, praying to the Lord as boatman to come to her rescue. Second, she is unbaked clay, which means the incompleteness of human knowledge. And, finally, the emotional climax, the cry of an unhappily married woman who longs to return home, or the world-entangled soul who longs for a union with the Divine.



*With a thin rope of untwisted thread  
Tow I ever my boat o'er the sea.  
Will God hear the prayers that I have said?  
Will he safely over carry me?  
Water in a cup of unbaked clay,  
Whirling and wasting, my dizzy soul  
Slowly is filling to melt away.  
Oh, how fain would I reach my goal.*



This entire *vaakh* is overlaid with her mystic quest. But, interestingly, it is the woman's voice in these lines which rings the clearest.



The most important contribution of Lal Ded has been to make the complex Shaiva philosophy accessible to the common people; it was brought out from the study closets of Sanskrit scholars to the *gulley mohallas* of Kashmir. Lalla's quest is likened to the Sufi creed of communicating the most complex doctrine in the language of the masses. Herein also lies the Sufi's strength. Hence the use of local idiom in the verses of Kabir, Khusrau, Bulley Shah, Shah Husain... the list is long. The mystic's challenge is to communicate the incommunicable vision. This is resolved through the use of common idioms, images and metaphors that people take as their own. Lalla sings:

*How shall I remain in this universe?  
The Supreme Lord Shiva will alone remain here.  
I will take Him on my lap and sing a lullaby  
and will seat Him and love Him  
in the warm corner of my heart.*

Here she is mother Lalla, nurturing Shiva as her child. In another *vaakh* she becomes the 'child', looking up at Him as the Lord of all creation. She expresses how He encompasses her entire being. There is no other consciousness in her; she is in a state of ecstatic bliss:

*You are the heaven and you are the earth,  
You are the day and you are the night,  
You are all pervading air,  
You are the sacred offering of rice and flowers  
and of water;  
You are yourself all in all,  
What can I offer you?*

The confidence that the next *vaakh* exudes is layered with multiple meaning. In a few words she expresses an important tenet of her philosophy of life – the need to go beyond the visible to the invisible core of Reality. One's gaze must transcend the outer; the outer, which is imbibed by the physical senses. It should turn inwards and sense the cognitive revelation. Hence, she can celebrate the freedom she experiences in dancing naked.



*The Guru gave me but one word of wisdom-  
From the outside bade me turn within  
That word for me, Lal, is the surest prophecy.  
And that is why I dance in naked abandon!*

And, finally, when she reaches the highest pinnacle of wisdom, the mystic realises that nothing exists but perhaps the voice. Books, formulae, mind, all merge within a Void. And, ultimately, even the voice melts into Nothingness:

*Holy books will disappear,  
and then only the mystic formula will remain.  
When the mystic formula departed,  
naught but mind was left.  
When the mind disappeared naught was left anywhere.  
And a voice became merged within the void.*

Finally, what about the woman Lal Ded? A child, a girl, a wife, a daughter-in-law, a disciple, a mendicant, a poet, a saint, an *Arifa* – what did she think of her life? What did she feel about her death? Her multi-layered existence, where would it go? This is the question we all have asked ourselves. What after the curtain comes down? This *vaakh* says it all:

*I constructed a house in the middle of a plain and  
I decorated it on all sides with many beautiful and precious things.  
The house will remain here and I shall have to go,  
just as a shopkeeper closes his shop and goes away.*



By Dr Syeda Saiyidain Hameed, Member of the Planning Commission of India. She is a feminist and writer who is widely recognised for her passionate engagement in public affairs and social issues, especially for women, minorities and peace. She is Founder Member of the Muslim Women's Forum and a Founder Trustee of the Women's initiative for Peace in South Asia. She is also Founder Member of Rumi Foundation.

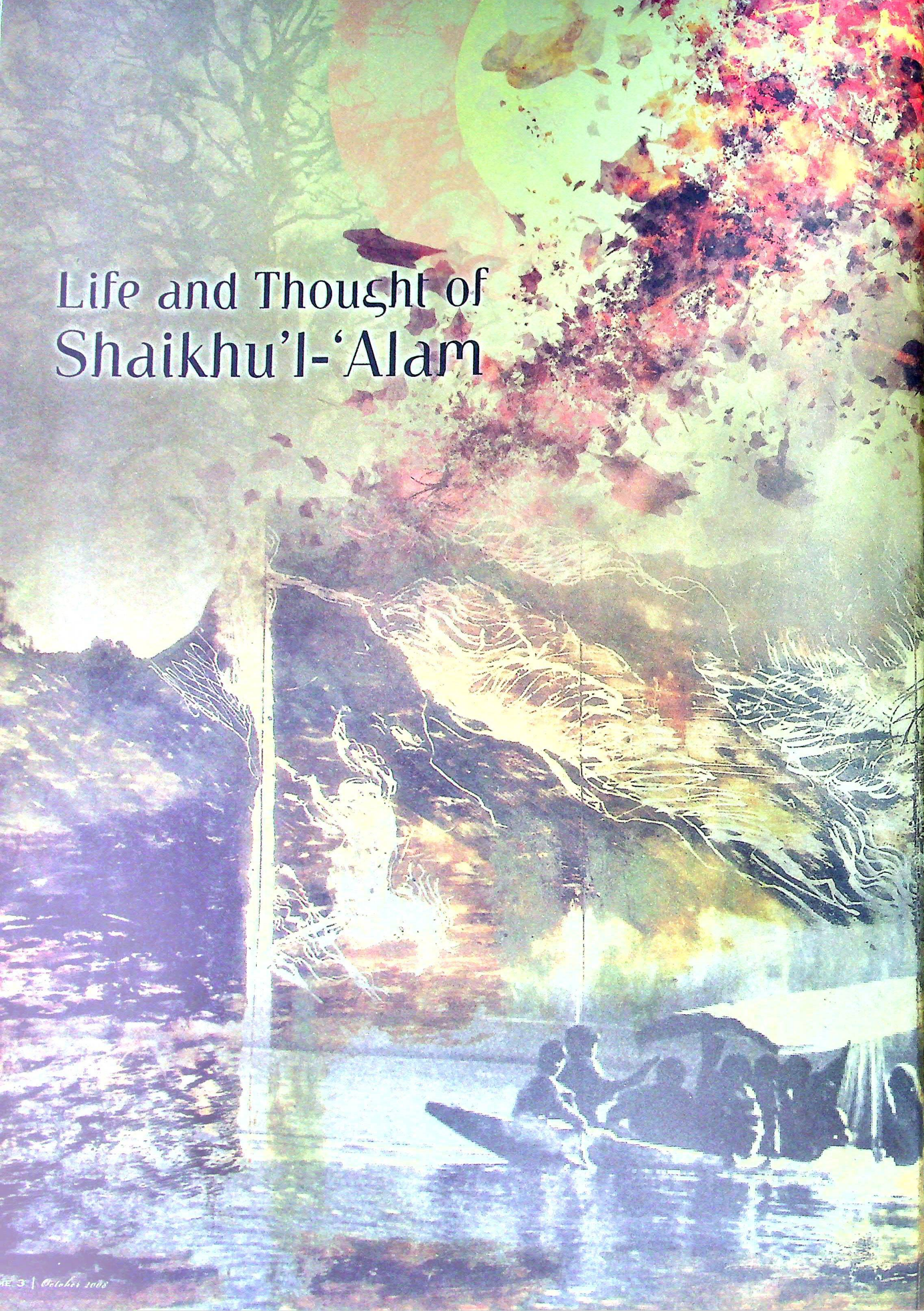




WA TU IZZU MAN-TASHAA U  
WA TUDHILLU MAN-TASHAA U

HE EXALTEST WHOM HE WILST  
HE ABASEST WHOM HE WILST





# Life and Thought of Shaikhu'l-'Alam



# ON EMBRACING ISLAM AT THE HANDS OF THE KUBRAWIYYA SUFİ, SAJIYID HUSAIN SIMNANI, THE VILLAGE WATCHMAN, SALAT SANZ,

assumed the name of Shaikh Salaru'd-Din. He was one of the early converts to Islam in Kashmir who gave birth to Shaikh Nuru'd-Din Rishi, popularly known as Shaikhu'l-Alam and 'Alamdar-i-Kashmir. The latter title suggests the standard-bearer of Kashmir. Interestingly, however, nowhere in his mystical poetry does the Shaikh refer to himself as Nuru'd-Din. Rather, he prefers to call himself Nund or Nanda Sanz, the family name by which he was known during his childhood. By virtue of being the founder of the *silsilah-i-Rishiyyan*, the indigenous order of Sufism in Kashmir, the Shaikh also came to be known as Nund Rishi.

Shaikhu'l-'Alam has left a unique record of his own mystical experience, a 'pilgrim's progress' in verse, narrated in a style which is not unlike that of Bunyan's – symbolical, exquisite and markedly subtle. He was heir to Lal Ded's mystical poetry. Some of his verses suggest that he had accepted her as his spiritual preceptor and drew inspiration from her poems. Consequently Lal Ded, a Shaivite *yogini* of the fourteenth century and a rebel against Brahmanism, and the Shaikh's poetry became the only vehicles for influencing the illiterate masses, particularly in rural society, who had and still have an incredible memory for verse. Lal Ded and Shaikhu'l-'Alam gave a meaning to the life of the Kashmiri people and provided the framework for the formation of a culture which drew its vitality from a conflict, a division, a torment and a struggle created in the individual psyche by the challenges posed to the caste-ridden social order.

For three days after his birth in 779/1378, Nund did not take milk from his mother. But, then, Lal Ded visited the house of the father of the newly-born, and addressed the latter:

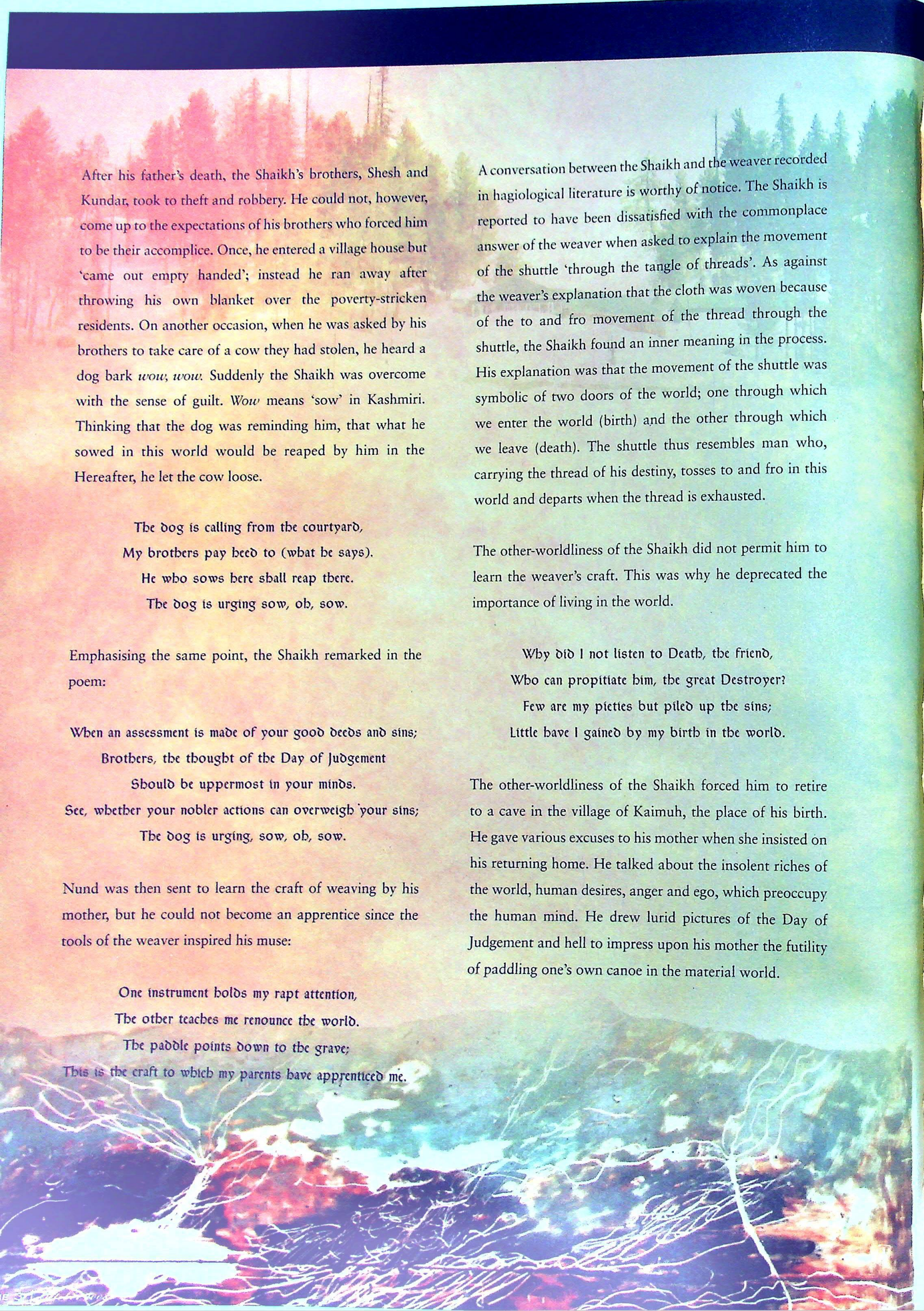
Thou wast not asbamed of being born; why then art thou  
asbamed of sucking (at the mother's breast)?

Subsequently, the baby started taking milk and Lal Ded's visits to the parental house of Nund continued. It was Lal Ded, indeed, who was the earliest source of inspiration for Nund. Thus, in one of his verses Nund, on treading the path of Sufism acknowledges his debt to Lal Ded:

That Lalla of Padmanpore  
Who had drunk the fill of nectar;  
She was an avatar of ours,  
O God grant me the same spiritual power.

Shaikhu'l-'Alam's religious career falls into three main stages: the first is that of an orphan struggling to eke out his mundane existence; the second is that of an ascetic who withdraws himself from worldly affairs in order to know the religious truth; and in the third and final stage he gives up the life of a recluse to advocate the ethics of a dynamic and positive nature. This division has in it the inevitable limitation of generalisation but, simultaneously, it helps us to perceive in a clearer light the shifts and changes which are natural to the evolution of a mystical career such as that of Shaikhu'l-'Alam's.





After his father's death, the Shaikh's brothers, Shesh and Kundar, took to theft and robbery. He could not, however, come up to the expectations of his brothers who forced him to be their accomplice. Once, he entered a village house but 'came out empty handed'; instead he ran away after throwing his own blanket over the poverty-stricken residents. On another occasion, when he was asked by his brothers to take care of a cow they had stolen, he heard a dog bark *wow, wow*. Suddenly the Shaikh was overcome with the sense of guilt. *Wow* means 'sow' in Kashmiri. Thinking that the dog was reminding him, that what he sowed in this world would be reaped by him in the Hereafter, he let the cow loose.

The dog is calling from the courtyard,  
My brothers pay heed to (what he says).  
He who sows here shall reap there.  
The dog is urging sow, oh, sow.

Emphasising the same point, the Shaikh remarked in the poem:

When an assessment is made of your good deeds and sins;  
Brothers, the thought of the Day of Judgement  
Should be uppermost in your minds.  
See, whether your nobler actions can outweigh your sins;  
The dog is urging, sow, oh, sow.

Nund was then sent to learn the craft of weaving by his mother, but he could not become an apprentice since the tools of the weaver inspired his muse:

One instrument holds my rapt attention,  
The other teaches me renounce the world.  
The paddle points down to the grave;  
This is the craft to which my parents have apprenticed me.

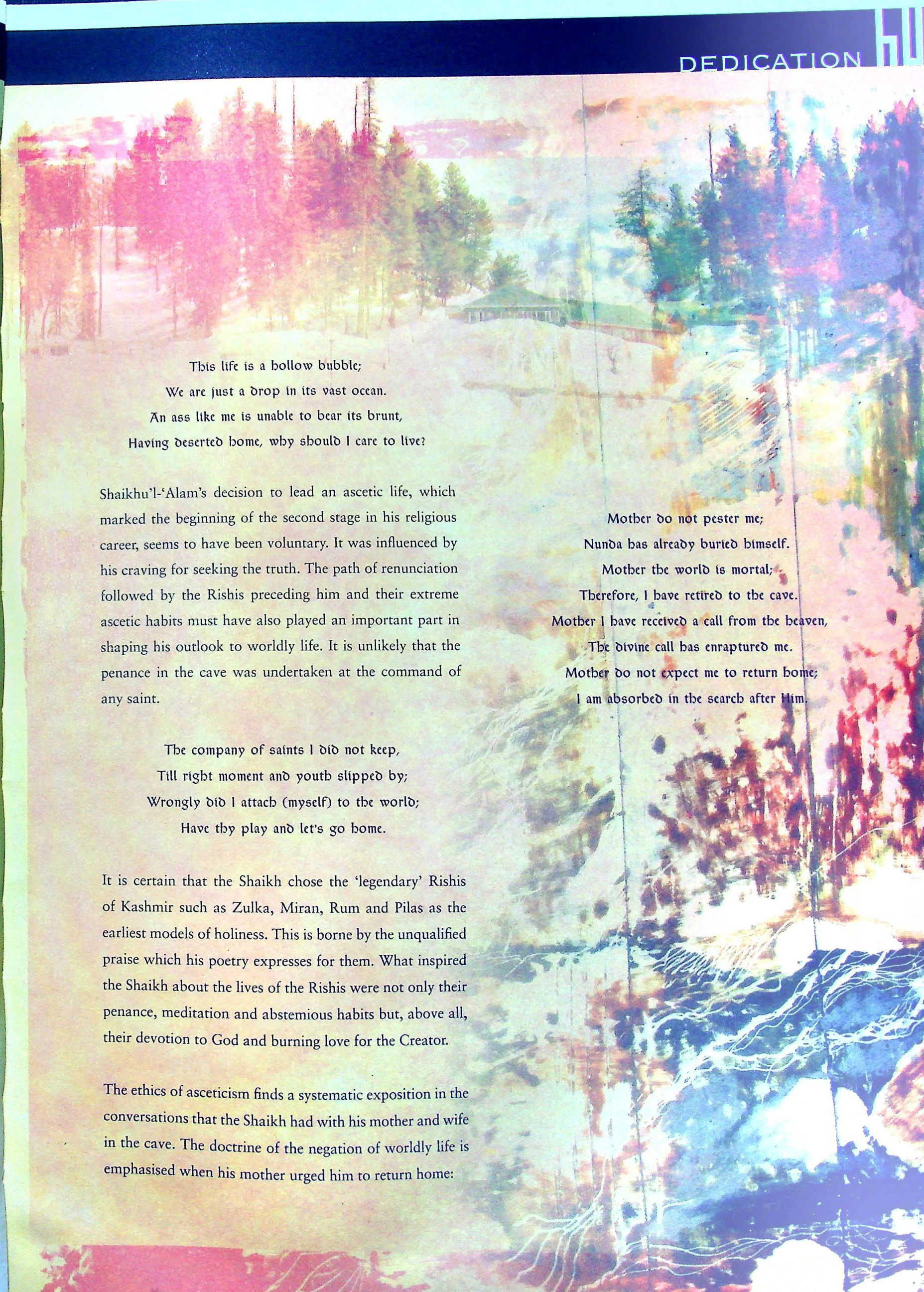
A conversation between the Shaikh and the weaver recorded in hagiological literature is worthy of notice. The Shaikh is reported to have been dissatisfied with the commonplace answer of the weaver when asked to explain the movement of the shuttle 'through the tangle of threads'. As against the weaver's explanation that the cloth was woven because of the to and fro movement of the thread through the shuttle, the Shaikh found an inner meaning in the process. His explanation was that the movement of the shuttle was symbolic of two doors of the world; one through which we enter the world (birth) and the other through which we leave (death). The shuttle thus resembles man who, carrying the thread of his destiny, tosses to and fro in this world and departs when the thread is exhausted.

The other-worldliness of the Shaikh did not permit him to learn the weaver's craft. This was why he deprecated the importance of living in the world.

Why did I not listen to Death, the friend,  
Who can propitiate him, the great Destroyer?  
Few are my pieties but piled up the sins;  
Little have I gained by my birth in the world.

The other-worldliness of the Shaikh forced him to retire to a cave in the village of Kaimuh, the place of his birth. He gave various excuses to his mother when she insisted on his returning home. He talked about the insolent riches of the world, human desires, anger and ego, which preoccupy the human mind. He drew lurid pictures of the Day of Judgement and hell to impress upon his mother the futility of paddling one's own canoe in the material world.





This life is a hollow bubble;  
We are just a drop in its vast ocean.  
An ass like me is unable to bear its brunt,  
Having deserted home, why should I care to live?

Shaikhul-'Alam's decision to lead an ascetic life, which marked the beginning of the second stage in his religious career, seems to have been voluntary. It was influenced by his craving for seeking the truth. The path of renunciation followed by the Rishis preceding him and their extreme ascetic habits must have also played an important part in shaping his outlook to worldly life. It is unlikely that the penance in the cave was undertaken at the command of any saint.

The company of saints I did not keep,  
Till right moment and youth slipped by;  
Wrongly did I attach (myself) to the world;  
Have thy play and let's go home.

It is certain that the Shaikh chose the 'legendary' Rishis of Kashmir such as Zulka, Miran, Rum and Pilas as the earliest models of holiness. This is borne by the unqualified praise which his poetry expresses for them. What inspired the Shaikh about the lives of the Rishis were not only their penance, meditation and abstemious habits but, above all, their devotion to God and burning love for the Creator.

The ethics of asceticism finds a systematic exposition in the conversations that the Shaikh had with his mother and wife in the cave. The doctrine of the negation of worldly life is emphasised when his mother urged him to return home:

Mother do not pester me;  
Nunda has already buried himself.  
Mother the world is mortal;  
Therefore, I have retired to the cave.  
Mother I have received a call from the heaven,  
The divine call has enraptured me.  
Mother do not expect me to return home;  
I am absorbed in the search after Him.



Reacting to his mother's insistence on eating sufficient food, the Shaikh remarked:

How can (good) food satiate  
(my spiritual thirst), mother?  
Give it to a dog or a Brahman.  
Can't I crush my ego?  
Having renounced home, why should I care to live.

And when Zai Ded implored her husband to give up the path of renunciation, the Shaikh said:

Zai, have love for the next world;  
Grooping in the dark will lead you nowhere.

Most of the verses composed by the Shaikh in the cave bear an indelible influence of Shaivite philosophy. Withdrawing his mind from all objective activities, the Shaikh turned towards the subject that is, the real self, and gradually got wholly absorbed in it.

Having forsaken all I sought You,  
While searching You the prime of my youth passed away,  
I remained in safety because of Your luminations.

Ascetic training is thus the prerequisite for the achievement of any higher mystical state. The following verse is also typical of the Shaivite way of renunciation:

He is near me I am near Him,  
I found solace in His nearness.  
In vain did I seek Him elsewhere,  
Lo! I found the Beloved within my own consciousness.

Again:

The universe is the objective manifestation of the essence  
of Shiva,  
If you realise it through annihilation of self, you will get  
merged into him.  
What will you find after death, if you do not recognise  
Him in this world?  
Search Him in yourself (and) give me keen hearing.

Although elements in the Shaikh's verses are compatible with the Shaivite aspiration of self-identification with God, the influence of the ontological monism of the Sufis on his inquisitive mind cannot be totally ruled out. The Shaikh does not draw formal and verbal parallels between the Hindu and Muslim ideas of unitive experience, but he fully elaborates the spirit that animates the mystical movements in Hinduism and Islam.

What qualities hast thou found in the world?  
To allow thy body a free, loose rope?  
The Musalman and Hindu sail in the same boat  
Have thy play and let us go home.

And while transcending the barriers of theological ethnocentrism the Shaikh remarks:

Among the brothers of the same parents,  
Why did you create a barrier?  
Muslims and Hindus are one  
When will God be kind to his servant?



Shaikhu'l-'Alam warns that worldly pleasures should not detract our attention from God, 'who is our home'. Life can become meaningful only when we are able to 'ascend back' into His presence. He brings to light the piercing longing of his soul seeking direct intervention of divine action to sanctify the human creature through a love that transfigures not only the soul but also the body through constant prayer.

Thou existed and Thou (alone) will exist,  
Continue to remember Thou, none, but Thou,  
Thou alone will assuage the anguish (of thy soul),  
O my soul, recognise thyself.

In the following verse, in particular, the Shaikh exhibits a trenchant religious impulse inspired by Hindu as well as Muslim sources and fervently prays for the vision of a transcendent yet immanent God.

Nirguana manifest thyself unto me,  
Thy name (alone) have I been chanting.  
Lord help me to reach the acme of my spiritual desires.  
I do remember (with gratitude) how kind Thou art,  
Thou removed all veils between Thyself and the Prophet  
And Thou revealed Quran unto him.  
Lord the one (Prophet) who remained steadfast  
in Thy way,  
I do remember with gratitude; how kind Thou art.



It follows that, at the prime of his youth, the socio-cultural tradition represented by Shaikhu'l-'Alam was purely mystical. His conception of the universe and the things around him were conducive to developing a relationship of differentiation with these phenomena. The self-image of man, according to such a view, was that of a quasi-divine being whose only aim was to attain mystical union with God. But how the norms of this-worldliness, which lead to the realisation of a substantive mode of relationship between man and his environment and between man and man, emerged in Shaikhu'l-'Alam's thought is an important question now worthy of examination.

In fact, the crystallisation of such a process began when Shaikhu'l-'Alam came in contact with Mir Saiyid Muhammad Hamadani, the son of Mir Saiyid 'Ali Hamadani (d. 1385). Like his illustrious father, Saiyid Muhammad Hamadani played an important role in the spread of Islamic teachings in Kashmir along with a number of his disciples. He became the spiritual preceptor of the Shaikh when the latter was in his early thirties. This is attested to not only by documentary evidence but also by a new trend in his thought which, undoubtedly, bore the deep imprint of Islam. Now the standards of the *Sunnah* began to mould his behaviour and thought. His poetry became didactic and he sought to make the teachings of the Qur'an intelligible to the commoners through a local idiom. The Shaikh also sought to adapt the Kashmiri mystical traditions to Islam and, significantly, legitimise the term Rishi by emphasising its Islamic origin:

The first Rishi was the Prophet Mubammad,  
The second in order was Hazrat Uways,  
The third Rishi was Zulka Rishi,  
The fourth in order was Hazrat Miran,  
The fifth Rishi was Rum Rishi,  
The sixth in order was Hazrat Pillas,  
The seventh (me) is mis-called a Rishi!

Do I deserve to be called a Rishi? What is my name?

While the Shaikh describes the Prophet as the first Rishi and Uways-i-Qarani as the second, significantly enough, the 'legendary' Rishis of the Valley have been treated in the same category in order of merit. Not surprisingly, the disciples of the Shaikh who were spread in every nook and corner of the Valley also came to be known as Uwaysis.

During the last stage of his mystical career, Shaikhu'l-'Alam undertook a series of long apostolic journeys throughout the length and breadth of the Valley. There are a number of villages in Kashmir, which still preserve the memory of his visit. During his peripatetic visits, the Shaikh attracted the humble and those who were ignored or held in contempt in the caste-ridden society.

Why are you harping on the caste (when)

His is the only caste?

His essence is beyond the bounds of knowledge.

The doers of noble deeds have the same caste,

And in the Hereafter, no one will bear any caste:

If O brother you surrender to Him

Then alone will you become pure.

While criticising the hypocrisy of the Brahmins, the Shaikh addresses them in the following terms:

O Pandits! O believers in Trīguna

Past and future are linked through present

O pestering Pandits whom do you want to deify,

Merge your mind in your vital breath.

Although the final stage of Nuru'd-Din's religious career is marked by the absorption of his Kashmiri identity into Islam, nowhere does he give any proof of an anti-Hindu sentiment. Significantly, he addresses Kashmiri Pandits as brothers and not as infidels (*kafirs*) or heretics (*mushrikin*).



Adam came as the first ancestor of man,  
 Mother Eve followed suit.  
 Wherefrom were the low castes born then?  
 How can members of the same family jeer at one another.

True, the Shaikh's appeal was meant for those whom he felt were untouched or unaccommodated by the existing institutions. But he drew even die-hard Brahmans to his fold. Of the four illustrious *khalifas* of Nuru'd-Din, the first, namely Bamu'd-Din, was a respectable Brahman saint before his conversion to Islam. He is said to have embraced Islam only after a good deal of discussion with the Shaikh.

Like most Sufis, the Shaikh lived in entire abnegation of all worldly enjoyments. He did not like the life of pomp and show and wanted his followers also to follow the path of the prophets.

Poverty is a shield against Hell,  
 Poverty is the virtue of prophets,  
 Poverty is the wealth of this and the next world.  
 Poverty is sweet and fragrant,  
 One who is steadfast in the path of poverty,  
 So will be honoured here and in the Hereafter.

Under the influence of Islamic spirituality (*tasawwuf*), the Shaikh also realised that physical seclusion associated with asceticism, however useful it may be in the inculcation of self-discipline, does not make up its essence. That rather lies in following the footsteps of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him):

There are jackals and monkeys in the forests,  
 The caves are infested with rats,  
 Those who offer prayers five times a day to wash off the  
 dirt of their heart;  
 Those who lead a family life, they are privileged.  
 A dutiful householder will be crowned (with success on

the Day of Judgement).

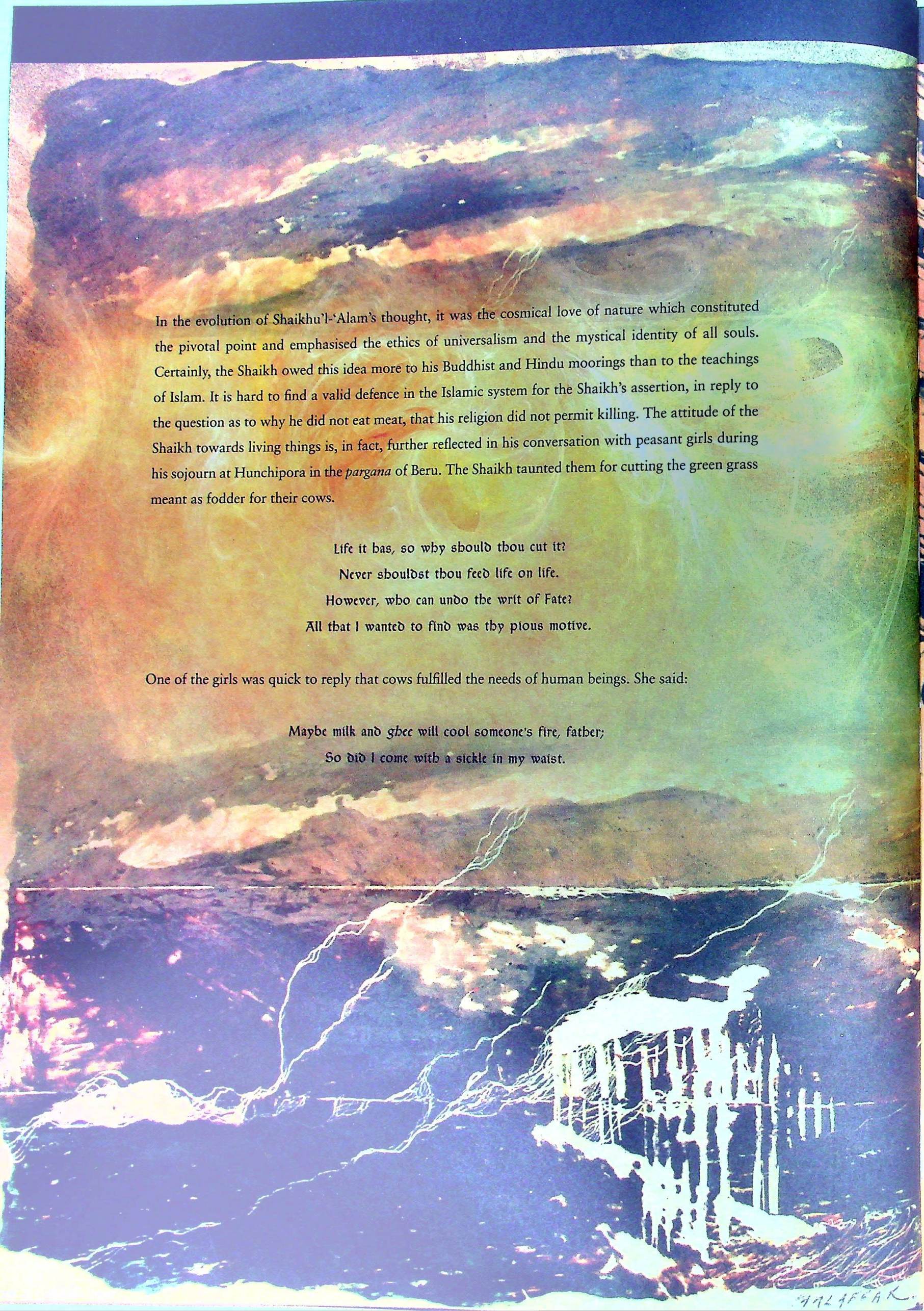
The messenger of Allah (Muhammad) led a marital life and won the divine grace.

The realisation of the futility of renouncing the world thus marks the beginning of the final stage in Nuru'd-Din's religious career. Following the Prophetic tradition, the Shaikh returned to the world from the cave with renewed vigour and faith:

O Supreme God, Thou art to be held in highest esteem  
 Since it was in seeking Thou that I was freed from the  
 delusions of self  
 Be kind enough to make me a powerful instrument of Thy  
 innate devotion;  
 I do remember (with gratitude) how kind Thou art.








In the evolution of Shaikhu'l-'Alam's thought, it was the cosmical love of nature which constituted the pivotal point and emphasised the ethics of universalism and the mystical identity of all souls. Certainly, the Shaikh owed this idea more to his Buddhist and Hindu moorings than to the teachings of Islam. It is hard to find a valid defence in the Islamic system for the Shaikh's assertion, in reply to the question as to why he did not eat meat, that his religion did not permit killing. The attitude of the Shaikh towards living things is, in fact, further reflected in his conversation with peasant girls during his sojourn at Hunchipora in the *pargana* of Beru. The Shaikh taunted them for cutting the green grass meant as fodder for their cows.

Life it has, so why should thou cut it?  
Never shouldst thou feed life on life.  
However, who can undo the writ of Fate?  
All that I wanted to find was thy pious motive.

One of the girls was quick to reply that cows fulfilled the needs of human beings. She said:

Maybe milk and *ghee* will cool someone's fire, father;  
So did I come with a sickle in my waist.





The Shaikh was so pleased with the girl's reply that he called her a hidden jewel (*ratna mani*). He also admitted her among his disciples, at her own request.

Taken as a whole, 'love' in Shaikhu'l-'Alam's thought signifies a mystical union with God in terms of 'servantship' (*'ubudiyyat*). In this oneness a traveller (*salik*) is profoundly conscious of his spiritual and social obligations as a humble servant of Allah. The most distinctive feature of such a man-God relationship is the active and sympathetic attitude towards all living creatures and unbounded faith in the acceptance of the equality of all creatures. Considering the Shaikh's emphasis on egalitarianism within the Qur'anic framework of mercy (*rahma*) and justice (*'adl*), the Rishi movement certainly emerged as a potent spiritual and social force during the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries in spite of political upheavals.

Little wonder, that Sufi literature abounds in the praise of the role of Shaikh Nuru'd-Din and a host of his Rishi followers who turned Kashmir into a real paradise on earth.



By Mohammad Ishaq Khan, former Professor of History at Kashmir University who was also Senior Leverhulme Research Fellow at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies. Further, he held the Shaikhu'l-'Alam Chair at his parent University. He is author of six books including - Kashmir's Transition to Islam: The Role of Muslim Rishis (Manohar, New Delhi and Gulshan, Srinagar), Experiencing Islam (Sterling, New Delhi and University Press, Dacca) and Crisis of a Kashmiri Muslim: Spiritual and Intellectual (Gulshan). Many research articles of his have been published in prestigious international journals in the UK and USA, Germany, Pakistan and India. His work Biographical Dictionary of Sufism in South Asia (Manohar) will be released this year.



# The Kubrauid Order



MIR SAYYED 'ALI HAS BEEN RECOGNISED AS ONE OF THOSE SUFIS OF THE KUBRAVID ORDER WHO PREACHED ISLAM IN INDIA, particularly in Kashmir. The man has been called 'macrocosm'. Who is he that has all the qualities of the macrocosm in him? God Almighty has bestowed upon such a man, talents that can make him rise high up to the Heavens. He is given superiority over all created beings. As he says: "Man in his self is a small world. But the fact is that in reality and qualitatively, he is a big world in himself."

According to Mir Sayyed 'Ali Hamadani, the universe on the whole is in a perfect man. Being one of the creatures among others, he is the centre of knowledge and the focus of attention of the world. The perfect man is the successor of God; the capability and power of understanding the whole universe has been gifted to him. God created all things that exist in the world for man, and by His free will He granted them all to him. Further, the objective of the existence of man is to get salvation for attaining joy and happiness in the end. Hamadani believed that only those people can attain real happiness who guide others to the right.

However, merely getting salvation in the next world cannot be called happiness. Real happiness lies in making an effort in this world to provide comfort to others and live with them peacefully.

Mir Sayyed 'Ali Hamadani was of the opinion that people, from the economic aspect, are bound to produce goods of various kinds so that they may provide the means of sustenance required by society. Everyone needs the help of others to provide themselves a livelihood, and everyone must make the best use of their talents.

In support of his view, he provided one of the traditions of Prophet Mohammad who said, "Muslims (that is, all human beings) are like the structure of a building in which every brick contributes towards raising it high and making it firm and beautiful. This is the duty of every person – that whatever capability and strength they have, they should make use of it in the path of God and to strengthen society."





Hamadani made his best effort to make people understand that if they did not fulfil the duty they owed society, they would live in poverty and suffer miseries. He also laid great stress on the point that the rich should spend their wealth in the path of God, they should work for the development of their society and provide comfort to the common people.



He taught people to check corruption and remove adversity from society. People should live peacefully so that there may be prosperity. This was the only way by which they could attain felicity in life. Shah-e-Hamadan (the sovereign of Hamadan) asked the Muslims rulers to win the hearts of the people and to fulfil the requirements of the needy – this was the highest degree of worship to God and the basic duty of the rulers. It was also how a good ruler could enter the sphere of spiritual life to attain felicity and salvation. The conclusion that he drew with all his advice was that the secrets of a stable government lay in serving the people by fulfilling their needs and maintaining justice among them. He also laid much emphasis on earning money by fair means. He believed that making an income by honest means was the highest economic duty of a man that would lead to the flourishing of the economy, remove inequity and bring stability in society. He strictly condoned the unfair exploitation of labour. He thought that it caused inequity and chaos in society.

Mir Sayyed 'Ali Hamadani travelled many times to Kashmir. However, though he did not stay for long in the valley (just over four years), he left behind a deep impact. There he brought many changes in the social, economic, religious and cultural fields. The political condition in Persia and Central Asia was unstable. This was the reason that Hamadani was in search of a peaceful land where he could perform his duties, to guide the people and rulers to the mystic path. With this purpose he sent some of his close relatives, disciples and friends, including his cousins Sayyed Taajaud Din and Sayyed Hosayn Semnami, to survey the political and economic conditions of Hindustan. They went to Kashmir and found the region suitable for the object and desire of Mir Sayyed 'Ali Hamadan. After this survey, Hamadani travelled to Hindustan. Some scholars

like Professor Shamsud Din Ahmad are of the opinion that Hamadani did not migrate to Hindustan with threats of attack to Timur. He had no other purpose than to preach the tenets of Islam and he chose the country of Kashmir as a suitable place for the purpose of doing so. He wrote in this regard:

"The fact is that Timur was a great supporter of Islam. It was natural that he had particular regard for Mir Sayyed 'Ali Hamadani. The story about the enmity between Hamadani and Timur is factitious."

Hayder Badakhshi, in his treatise *Mastūraat*, wrote that Hamadani travelled to Hindustan at the instruction of Prophet Mohammad:

"Amir-e-Kabir (the great noble) Sayyed 'Ali Hamadani was sitting facing Mecca. There appeared His Holiness Prophet Mohammad, the most generous. He addressed him as His and directed him to go to Kashmir and preach the Islamic faith among the people of that region..."

The situation of Hindustan, particularly of Kashmir, was quite suitable for the object of Mir Sayyed 'Ali Hamadani. There was a great vacuum on religious, intellectual, cultural and economic levels and there was the urgent need for reform. The tradition of *sati* was a common practice among Hindus. Hinduism and Buddhism were on their decline, Muslim rulers did not know anything regarding Islamic principles. The country was passing through an economic crisis. These were the reasons for the need of



از تپیداران پتیب بهشت  
 گفت روی با این بخت بهشت  
 دل مدح می خواند است مدام  
 فتنه ای در حضور سید عالم  
 سید السادات سید عالم  
 دست ام مبارک تقدیر ام  
 تاغزالی در سر عالم  
 ذکر فکر از دود مان او گرفت  
 مرشد آن کشور مینو نظیر  
 میر و درویش و سلاطین را پیشتر  
 خط را آن شاه دریا آستین  
 داد علم و صفت و تهذیب دین  
 آفرید آن مرد ایران صغیر  
 باینتر هائے عزیز و دل پذیر

یک نگاه او گویا صد گره  
 خیر و شیرین را به دل راه

علاء محقق





a reformer like Hamadani. Therefore, when he reached there the people received him with open arms.

Among those who accompanied Mir Sayyed 'Ali Hamadani to Hindustan were religious scholars, artisans, craftsmen and art designers. They either belonged to Persia or Central Asia. They brought wonderful changes in the industry of this country, particularly in Kashmir. A significant one was in the economic life of the people. Of his companions, the larger number comprised craftsmen and artisans. From the economic point of view, he laid much emphasis on production so that the economic requirements of society could be fulfilled. He also said that the people should work hard and use fair means to earn their livelihood. The followers of Hamadani adopted some art or craft. He, too, worked to earn money and made head gear. This brought a remarkable change in society and there was much economic growth.

At that time, the shawl weaving industry was in a deteriorated condition. Hamadani restored it with the help of his companions. He encouraged the people of Kashmir to make an effort and also introduced some other handicrafts with the help of which the shawl weaving industry flourished. His companions raised the shawl trade to a high level and monopolised it. They expanded trade and laid the foundation for its continual growth in the coming centuries.

Haji Mukhtar Shah, at the end of the thirteenth century AD, wrote a treatise called *Resaalai fann-e-shaal baafi* (a treatise on the art of shawl weaving) which is preserved in the manuscript section of the university of Kashmir. He mentioned explicitly how his family migrated to Kashmir with Shah-e-Hamadan and took part in developing the shawl weaving industry. And how this industry played an important role in the betterment of the economic life of the people of Hindustan, particularly of the inhabitants of Kashmir. As this merchandise was being exported to Iran, Egypt, France, Germany, England, Russia and America, it brought in foreign exchange.

"About forty lakh of rupees came every year from France to this country through this business. There are about eight hundred workshop owners who run the shawl weaving industry. There are twenty-five thousand people who are engaged in shawl making and who, with the members of their families, become seventy thousand people. Besides these, there are traders, darners and repairers of the shawls, also in very large numbers."

He described the varieties of shawls and how in every region of the world there is a particular kind of shawl which is in demand. The people of Kashmir make shawls for every nation according to its preference. He also mentioned the causes of the decline of the industry. How, during the end of the nineteenth century, there was a big demand for Kashmiri shawls all over the world. But due to the heavy duty on these goods, some people reduced the quality and raised the price. This was the main reason for the setback of this trade.





Even today, shawl making in Kashmir is called *kar-e-Amiri* (the work of 'Amir'), which refers to Mir Sayyed 'Ali Hamadani. This by itself is the most important evidence to show the all-round influence of Hamadani and his followers in the expansion of this industry.

Another industry that was brought by Hamadani was cap making that provided good employment to the people. In fact, Hamadani himself earned his means of sustenance by making head gear. A hat made by him was gifted to Sultan Qutbud Din (780–796 AH / AD 1335–1351). The Sultan felt honoured and put the hat under his crown. The same hat was kept under their crowns by his descendants, as a sacred gift. This tradition continued up to the time of Fath Shah (895–898 AH / AD 1536–1539); when he died, the hat was put in his shroud and buried.

Apart from these two industries, there were other arts and crafts that were brought by Hamadani's disciples.

When Mir Sayyed 'Ali Hamadani migrated to Kashmir, the people with him included religious scholars, Sufis, artisans and craftsmen. These people were in fact the cultural representatives of Persia who came to Hindustan with him. They opened avenues in the fields of art, craft, culture, religion and mysticism that even today are very popular among many people of the Indian subcontinent. There came such a great influence of Persia over Kashmir that Mohammad Iqbal, the celebrated Persian and Urdu poet originally belonging to that region, admitted that Mir Sayyed 'Ali Hamadani had created a minor Persia (*Iran-e-Saghir*) in the Indian subcontinent.

This he described in the following poem:

*Aaz tap-e-yaaraan tapidon dar behesht*

*Kohna gham baa raa kharidam dar behesht.*

(I was burning with fever in Paradise, finding friends suffering from that.

I purchased the old griefs (of them) in Paradise.)

*Goft Rumi Aanche mi Aayad negar.*

*Del madeh baa Aanche begozasht aaye pesar.*

(Rumi said, "Face that whatever occurs.  
O dear! Do not think of that what has gone by.")

*Nagma yi me khwand Aan mast modaam*

*Dar hozour-e-Sayyed 'Ali-e-waalaa moqaam.*

(That ever intoxicated person chanted a melodious song,  
In the presence of the (spiritual) leader of high dignity.)

*Sayyed ol saadaat, saalaar-e-ajam*

*Dast-e-u m'baar-e-taqdir-e-omam.*

(The leader of the leaders, the general of Persia.

His hand was the builder of the destiny of the people.)

*Taa ghazaali dars-e-Alla Hu gereft*

*Zekr-e-fekr aaz doudmaan-e-gereft.*

(Since Ghazzali started to call, "He is God".

He acquired the invocation (of God) and meditation from that family.)

*Morshed-e-Aan keshwar-e-minu nazir*

*Mir-o darvish o salaatin raa moshir.*

(The spiritual guide of the country symmetrical to paradise.  
He is chief, a darvish and the counsellor of sultans.)

*Khetta raa Aan Shaah-e-daryaa Astin*

*Dad 'elm o san'at o tabzib o din.*

(That generous hearted gave to the region (of Kashmir)  
The knowledge, the craft, the culture and the religion.)

*Aafrid Aan mard iraan-e-saghir*

*Baa honar haay-e-gharib o delpazir.*

(The man created the Minor Iran  
With the wonderful and heart pleasing arts.)

*Yak negaat-e-gohaayad sad gerah*

*Khiz o tirash raa be del raahi bedeh.*

(His one glance opens hundreds of ties.

Get up, to receive his arrow upon your heart.)

Mir Sayyed 'Ali Hamadani could have become the successor of his father at Hamadan if he liked. But he chose the



spiritual kingdom of 'Iran Minor' and became the king of the people of Kashmir for ever.

There are some arts and crafts in Kashmir that have been prevailing since ancient times. But when studied carefully, it becomes evident that there was a great influence of Persian art and craft over them. Especially in wood work, painting, book binding, folder decoration, carpet weaving, tent making, paper work, copper work, oil crushing, wood carving, chintz printing and colour designing, the Persian influence is remarkably visible.

Handicraft, particularly embroidery work and the making of silk garments with delicate flower designs, is still the living industry in Kashmir. This craftsmanship has gained good reputation all over the world. Another craft of the people of Kashmir is carpet making. They still use the same patterns, designs and material which were very common for many centuries in the carpet weaving industry in Iran. Carving on walnut wood and making inlay and embossed designs on wood is another Kashmiri art. This too was brought by the followers of Mir Sayyed 'Ali Hamadani and made popular there.

The sultans and other rulers of Kashmir admitted to the significance and superiority of Persian art and design over their own local art and craft and, therefore, invited the Persian artisans and craftsmen to their country and received them with great honour. Pir Hasan, the compiler of *Tarikh-e-Hasan* (the history of Hasan) wrote: "(Sultan Zain ul Abedin) invited men of every art and craft from distant countries and made them inhabitants here. He gave each of them some estate and rank. Subsequently, he called book binders, paper makers, carpet weavers, inkstand makers, carvers and seal makers from Samarkand and made them settle down here."

All the above mentioned arts and crafts are still very common in Kashmir. They are considered special to the region. There were also some industries that were prevalent in Kashmir in the ancient period. Here, the example of shawl making can be given which, in the legendary age,

was considered very valuable merchandise. There is a reference to the *Mahabharata*, that when lord Krishna went to meet the people of the Kaurav clan, they presented him ten thousand shawls of Kashmir. G.M.D. Sufi a historian wrote on Kashmir:

"It is said that the shawl industry in Kashmir is old like the mountains... But what we call 'shawl' got its rebirth at the end of the fourteenth century and the shawl industry got a fresh life, which is due to the efforts of Shah-e-Hamadani and his companions."

Wali Sing Sikand, the author of the book *Naqsh-e-Tassawouf Dar Kashmir* (the role of mystics in Kashmir), wrote about the influence of the Kubravid order on the industries of Kashmir:

"Mir Sayyed 'Ali Hamadani travelled all over Kashmir and founded the Kubravid order there. His seven hundred disciples came with him from Iran and Central Asia... Besides preaching Islam, they played a key role in the development of art and craft. Today, Kashmir is famous for these crafts and industries that had already developed in Iran. For example, shawl weaving, carpet making, paper paste calligraphy, iron work, silver work, metal work and book binding."

The rulers and the common people of Kashmir embraced Islam under the influence of the teachings of Hamadani and they accepted 'effort and hard work' as their religious culture. They made admirable effort for economic expansion in their country. According to historians, there were ten thousand idol makers in the thirteenth century. When, by the effort of Hamadani, Islam gained popularity in Kashmir, idol making stopped. This was because Hamadani, his followers and disciples encouraged these idol makers who had newly embraced Islam to adopt carving, engraving and handicrafts as their profession.

In the metal work of Kashmir and Northern India, the combination of Persian, Indian and Chinese art can be seen. There is no doubt that there is an amalgamation of these different arts but Persian art is dominant. It should be noted that Kashmiri artisans not only imitated Persian or Chinese



art, but they also made innovations and modifications under the regional conditions. In enamel work, they have excelled Persian and Chinese works.

Calligraphy is another Persian art which fully developed and flourished in Kashmir and throughout India. Unfortunately, the greater part of the written pieces of calligraphy have disappeared, though the inscriptions at mosques and shrines that still exist are proof of how skilled the calligraphers were in this art. Inscriptions are written in *Naskh* and *Nastaliq* styles. Though their attention was mainly on the *Naskh* style, during the reign of Shah Miri and the Chak dynasties, *Nastaliq* was more popular than *Naskh*. During the reign of Sultan Zain ul 'Abedin, many calligraphers migrated from Persia and Central Asia to Kashmir. The most renowned among them was Mohamnad Husyn. When Mughal Emperor Akbar occupied Kashmir, Husyn received the title of *Zarrin Qalam* (the golden pen) from him.

The most important evidence of the influence of Persian art and craft in Hindustan, particularly in its northern part, is that the names of these arts and crafts are still in common use among the people of Kashmir. Some of these are:

*Araq kash* (the distiller), *ahangar* (blacksmith), *ashpaz* (the cook), *tabardar* (the axe holder), *baqqal* (the grocer), *jeldgar* (the book binder), *chobkar* (the embroiderer), *chermigar* (the tanner), *hakkak* (the carver), *khattat* (the scribe), *khushnavis* (the calligrapher), *q'aligar* (the tinner), *kaghaz saz* (the paper maker), *qaabsaz* (the frame maker), *monabbat kar* (the carver), *naqqahgar* (the painter), *najjar* (the carpenter), *nagin saz* (the lapidary), *namad saz* (the felt maker) and *n'alband* (the farrier).

It is pertinent to mention here that the representatives of the Kubravid order in Hindustan not only preached their mystic thoughts and ideas but also brought many positive and constructive changes in society to make life better for its members. They left behind a rich heritage in the political, economic and social fields that will last long. Iqbal, the renowned poet of the Indian subcontinent said:

*Aafrid Aan mard Iran-e-saghir*

*Baa honarhaaye gharib o dil pazir.*


(With his wonderful and heart pleasing arts,

That man made (Kashmir) the Iran minor.)



Translation by Dr Yunus Jaffery, well-known scholar of Persian language and literature. A great admirer of Jalaluddin Rumi, he has done a lot of work on Sufism. In January 2008, he was awarded the first Farabi international award as 'Outstanding Scholar of Persian Language and Literature' by Mo-himud Ahmadinejad, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran. It was arranged by UNESCO and ISESCO (the ministry of science and technology of Iran). This work is part of a dissertation on 'Mysticism' by author, Dr Abdullah Atayi.





# THE VALLEY BECKONS



THE KASHMIR VALLEY STANDS IN TURMOIL TODAY BUT, EVEN WITH THIS BACKDROP, THERE IS AN ELEMENT OF SERENITY AROUND the several Sufi *dargahs* that stand dotted in and around the Valley.

In fact, the refugee crisis isn't just an offshoot of the present-day political upheavals. During the earlier centuries, the Sufis who fled from Central Asia, Iran and Iraq to our country, found not just refuge but also anchorage. And, perhaps, because of geographical reasons, the majority of these Sufis took refuge in and around the Valley. To this day, their graves and *dargahs* stand...

About forty kilometres off Srinagar is the *dargah* of the Iraqi Sufi Syed Ali. In Srinagar's downtown is the *dargah* of Shah Hamadan who had to flee from Hamadan to escape the wrath of Timur, and it is said that about seven hundred Sayyids accompanied him into the Valley during the reign of Sultan Shihabuddin in 1372 AC.

What seems surprising is that none of these Sufis ever went back to their homelands, even when the turmoil had settled down. There could be several explanations for this but the most probable one is that the local population had been totally taken up by their selflessness and simplicity. Historian G. M. D. Sufi's argument is – "Deeply imbued with the Sufism of the age and country from which they emigrated, these Sayyids and their followers seem to have stimulated the tendency to mysticism for which Vedantism and Buddhism had already paved the way... perhaps, also, shocked at the tyranny and self-assertion of Timur, these Sayyids and others may have sought refuge in the regions of the abstract thought as a solace from the worldly repression under which their country then laboured..." (Let me add that several like Sufi Nizamuddin Aulia, fled to save themselves from the repeated Mongol invasions that Central Asia was subjected to. Nizamuddin Aulia never once returned to the country of his roots and is buried in Basti Nizamuddin, New Delhi.)

And though politics held sway even in those bygone centuries, mysticism seemed the ultimate. In fact, in his memoirs, Mughal Emperor Jehangir has focused on the lives of these Sufis – "Though they have no religious knowledge or learning of any sort, they possess simplicity and are without pretence. They abuse no one. They restrain the tongue of desire and foot of seeking. They eat no flesh, they have no wives and always plant fruit-bearing trees in the fields so that men may benefit by them, themselves desiring no advantage..."

Abu'l Fazl records his meeting with Wahid Sufi, "Here an enlightened anchorite has come to my view – for thirty years he has, in an unnoticed corner, been gathering happiness on an old mat..."

One could go on with what these Sufis lived for. Leading absolutely selfless lives, living with just about the bare basics, amidst stark simplicity... so influenced had Mughal Prince Dara Shikoh been that he built in Srinagar, the unique school of Sufism called the 'Kas-i-Mah'. The first of its kind in the whole of Asia and Central Asia, he built it at the instance of his spiritual teacher, Akhund Mulla Mohammad Shah, who came from Badakshan. In fact, it was said to be the only one of its kind in the whole of Asia. Today, its dilapidated remains can be witnessed lying close to the Chashme Shahi springs.



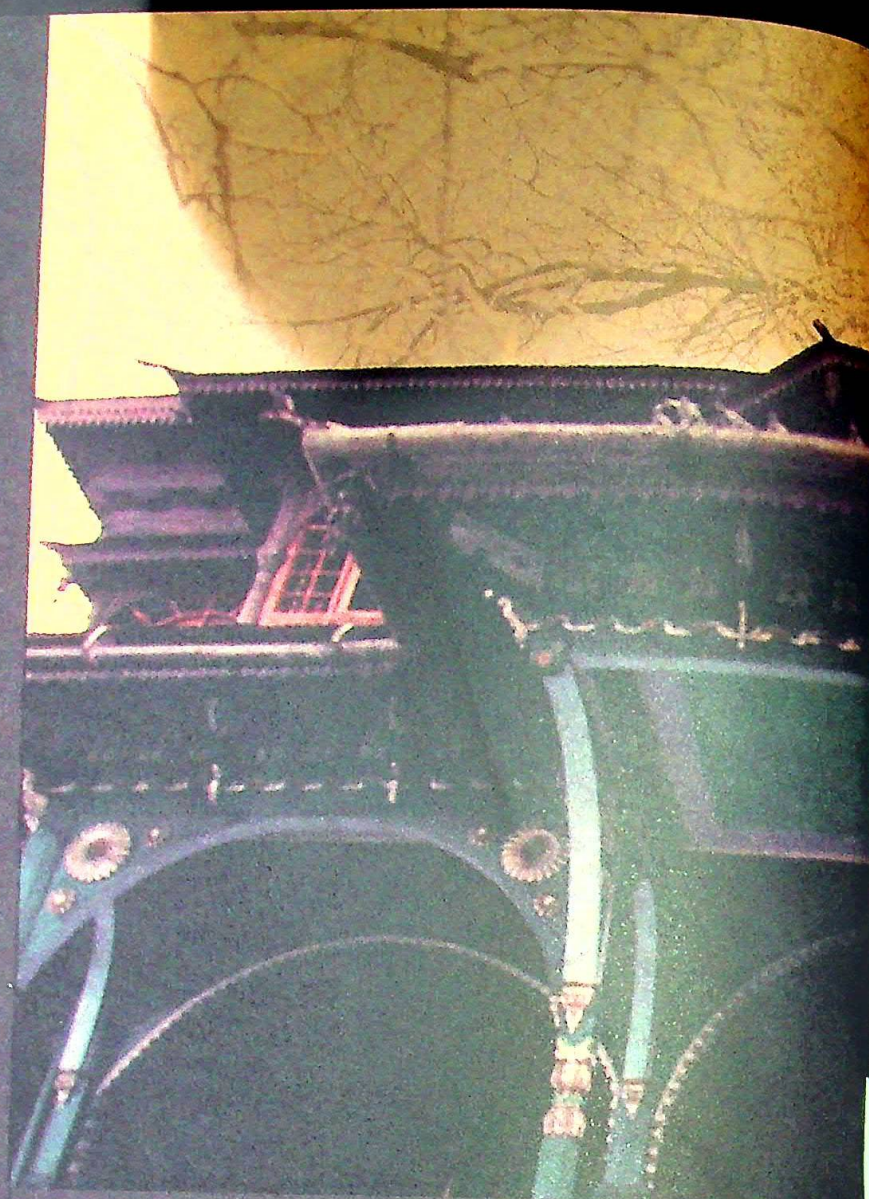
It is amazing how these Sufis travelled towards the Kashmir valley and became one with the people. Almost a contrast to today's times when strife seems to be bringing in deeper divisions and keeping refugees at bay. Ironically, even in a city like New Delhi where those affected by the 'Partition' found refuge, we seem to have forgotten those trying times for there seems little effort being made to reach out to present-day refugees living in this very city. Obviously, the refugees of today cannot be expected to turn Sufis or demonstrate mystical powers but, surely, they can be accepted as they are? And do not overlook the fact that seeking refuge is a state of the mind. Don't we, many times, close our eyes and mentally transport ourselves from the most trying of situations to the less trying, as though finding ways and means of escape, from one particular situation to the next, which could be a little further away from the painful realities and insecurities of the day?

#### COME ALONG, TO THESE DARGAHS

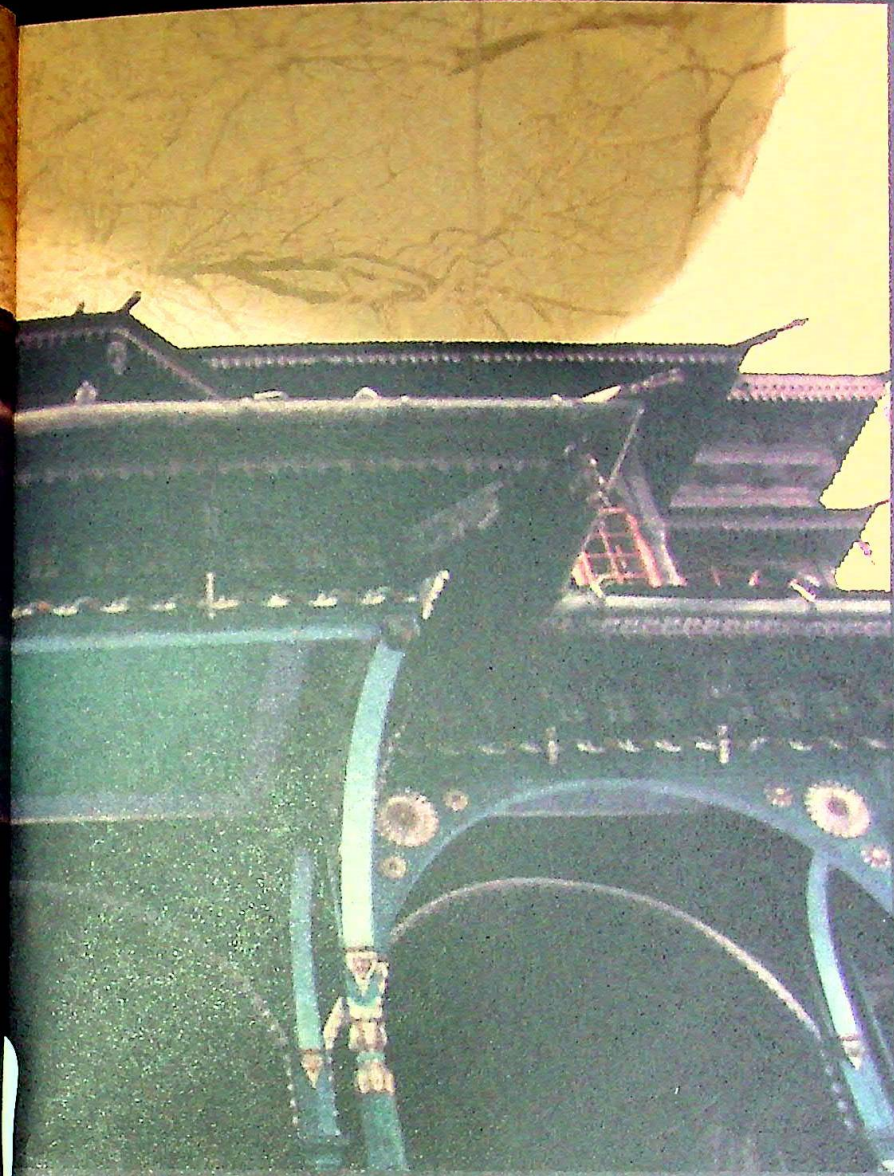
Each time I visit Srinagar, I make it a point to visit at least some of these *dargahs*. Built in the pagoda style, some are laced with elaborate, intricate wooden carvings, while others are equipped with the bare basics. And unless there is an ongoing curfew or a crackdown in that area, you will find many local Kashmiris rendering prayers and looking at these structures, in hope... perhaps, the hope of better times and the lessening of turbulence and tensions.

Several *dargahs* are situated in the Srinagar city itself – to be nearer precision, in and around the Nowhatta Chowk area. And moving a little away from this Chowk, on the banks of the river Jhelum is the *dargah* of Shah Hamadan. The very design and architecture of this *dargah* stands out. At nightfall, it is beautiful when its reflection gets picked up by the waters of the flowing Jhelum. Though the original structure was built in 1395, it was rebuilt several times and the present structure dates back to 1732.

On the other side of Nowhatta Chowk, overlooking the main road is the *dargah* of the Iraqi Sufi, Dastgeer Sahib. There are different opinions related to whether he came to Srinagar, or it were some of his descendants who came and settled in Srinagar and built this *darat*.







Still further, just a few hundred metres ahead, is another *ziarat* with a large-sized board – Ziarati Hazrati Yousa Aza Syed Nasiruddin. Inside the compound there are two graves, one average-sized but the other far beyond the average length... the two graves are those of Syed Nasiruddin and Hazrat Yousa Aza. There are several theories around the identity of Yousa Aza, with some of them going as far as to say that he was one of the descendants of Moses.

Further ahead, on the slopes of Hari Parbat, stands the *dargah* of Sheikh Hamza Makhdum, the Sufi scholar of the fifteenth century.

On the outskirts of Srinagar city there are several *dargahs*. Prominent is that of the patron saint of the Valley, Sheikh Nuruddin Wali at Charar-e-Sharif, which lies twenty miles southwest of Srinagar. As historian G. M. D. Sufi writes in his volume titled *Kashir – Being a History of Kashmir*, “Sheikh Nuruddin, the preceptor of all Rishis, was a great devotee who had a deep communion with God. In addition to leading a retired and solitary life, he was also one of those who continually fasted. He had given up having flesh, onions, milk and honey for many years. He was a man with intuition; he had spiritual powers. Sheikh Nuruddin appears to have married Zai Ded and had two sons and a daughter. On the death of the children, Zai Ded also renounced the world and became a hermitress... The simplicity and purity of Sheikh Nuruddin’s life deeply impressed the Kashmiris who entertain the highest veneration for the saint.” This historian also points out that Afghan Governor, Ata Muhammad Khan, had coins struck in the name of Sheikh Nuruddin in 1223-25 AH = 1808-10 AC. He also maintains that perhaps, in human history, this was the first time that coins were struck in the honour of a saint. Several kilometres further is Pokhor Por, and amidst the scenic beauty of this place stands the *dargah* of the Iraqi Sufi, Syed Ali. There are numerous stories about the power in command of this Sufi and one of them is that even today, if a man looks in the direction of the graves of the womenfolk of his family (situated on one side of the compound), he is sure to turn blind for these women were from the Sufi’s family and no man was supposed to look at them.



The Valley has had several women mystics. In fact, Lalla Ded's life and the turns in it could be termed as many as the names she is bestowed with. Besides being called Lalla Arifa, Lalla Ded and Lalla Maji, the Hindus call her Laleshwari or Lalla Yogeshwari. It is said that though she was born into a Hindu family in 735 AH (1335 AC), she was so deeply influenced by the Sufi thought and the Sufis of that era that she embraced Islam. But, then, she was a mystic whose perceptions and beliefs went beyond set parameters. Her marriage was an unhappy one... and she just walked away from it... wandering about in search of peace. Till she found solace in her very soul.

As her verse goes:

*Passionate, with longing in mine eyes  
Searching wide, and seeking nights and days  
Lo, I beheld the Truthful one, the Wise  
Here in mine own House to fill my gaze  
That was the day of my lucky star  
Breathless, I held him my Guide to be.*

And a visit to the Valley would remain incomplete without paying a visit to the famed Hazrat Bal shrine. It is situated at one extreme end of Dal Lake, on the site of one of the early Mughal gardens known as Sadiqabad, built during Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan's rule. Historian G. M. D. Sufi states that the sanctity of Hazrat Bal is derived from the Prophet's hair, which was brought from Madina to Bijapur by Sayyid Abdullah in 1111 AH (1699 AC) during the Mughal rule. Sayyid Abdullah gave it to a Kashmiri merchant, Khwaja Nuruddin Ishbar, who brought it to Srinagar. And with that Hazrat Bal is one of the prime shrines in the Valley.



By Humra Quraishi, writer, journalist and author of the book Kashmir – The Untold Story, published by Penguin in 2004.



بنمای رخ که باغ و گلستانم آرزوست  
 بکشای لب که قند فراوانم آرزوست  
 ای آفتاب رخ بنمای از نقاب ابر  
 کان چهره مشعشع تابانم آرزوست



*Show thy face, for I desire the orchard and the rose garden;  
 Ope' thy lips, for I desire sugar in plenty.  
 O Sun, show forth thy face from the veil of cloud,  
 But I desire that radiant, glowing countenance.*

*Rumi - translated by Reynold A. Nicholson*



# Crafts of Kashmir

*timeless skills and the sound of gunfire*





LAST MONTH, I SAT IN JAN MOHAMMAD'S TINY LOFT IN THE OLD CITY IN SRINAGAR, GETTING FABRIC HAND-PRINTED FOR embroidery. The scene seemed untouched by the years...

Shelves stretch to the ceiling with intricately carved mulberry wood blocks, some over a hundred years old, their motifs – *chinar* leaves, paisleys, kingfishers and iris. Jan Mohammad kneels at a low table, on a *namda* stained with the printing dyes of his forefathers; his *ferān* and long fingers equally impregnated with colour. A *samovar* of salt tea stands by his side, a *hookah* bubbles nearby. The sound of the block, coated with a rice flour and resin paste, striking the fabric, creates a rhythmic counterpoint to the wheezing music of his ancient transistor. His austere yet whimsical face is intense with the concentration of an artist.

Outside, in the narrow street, wooden houses touch roofs, their fretwork balconies loaded with pink-cheeked children, and drying chillies and apples. Nearby, on the Dal Lake, *shikaras* ply, *chinars* and poplars soar against the blue skies and snow-clad mountain tops, and willows bend pliant feathered branches to the slow waters. A muezzin chants, and a dozen more calls to prayers resound in the quiet air. A couple of women, come to get their shawls printed, sit embroidering. The regular *puk-puk* sound of their hooked *ari* needles, puncturing the taut cloth stretched on their embroidery frames in an endless series of tiny stitches, has a soothing quality – a sound that has echoed in the Valley over the centuries.

Sadly, Kashmir's tranquil beauty is an illusion. A sudden crack of gunfire bizarrely echoes the sound of Jan Mohammad's fist banging his block on the cloth. A stone smashes against the window. Peering cautiously out, we see a mob hurling rocks, a gun battle with armoured jeeps and police, shops being set afire... They are protesting the death of two young boys killed by the army. We are prisoners for the day, a curfew is announced – there will be no more work in the city this week. Jan Mohammad's home in Naid Kadal is the hub of militant insurgency and constant military crackdowns. People live in fear – of their families getting drawn into confrontation, of armed raids and reprisals, of crippling poverty... The economy of the Valley, long dependant on the centuries-old rhythms of tourism and craft, is in decline.

Nevertheless, all over Kashmir, craftspeople – carpet weavers and spinners, shawl makers and embroiderers, *papier-mâché* painters, walnut wood carvers, brass workers, jewellers, basket makers – sit together, continuing ornamenting every possible surface, from an expensive *pashmina* shawl to a rustic wicker basket. Craft is not just a means of employment and earning, but of self-expression and emotional bonding. In a population of just over ten million, nearly three-and-a-half lakh people are directly engaged in craft! Even women have taken to embroidery, long a male preserve. Their husbands and fathers are absent – dead, in jail, in the Indian metros trying to eke out a living, or with the Mujahideen.



WHAT MAKES KASHMIRIS SUCH CONSUMMATE CRAFTSPEOPLE? Craftsmanship is a form of communication. One man's way of interpreting the needs of another, and transmuting his creative impulse and aesthetics into fulfilment of that need. It is also a response to the environment and society. Craft is not just an integral part of civilisation, but its microcosm. A manifestation of a way of life and central themes. Kashmir, though trapped in its violent present, is essentially a civilisation in search of the ultimate.

The creation of beautiful objects is not just a mechanical commercial process but an essential part of man's contribution to his environment. The enjoyment of beauty, and beauty as an integral component of functional design, has itself become a component of culture. As the textile scholar, Jenny Housego, says in an essay on Kashmiri embroidery, "Combined with the Kashmiri tradition of Sufism, embroidery becomes a form of meditation. Thus, highly skilled craftsmanship in Kashmir creates masters not only of art (and this is how it is regarded), but also of the Sufi way of life. The Master works with his craftsmen in the development of skills both technical and spiritual. The embroiderers sometimes sing traditional Kashmiri Sufi songs or chant in unison verses from the Koran. Inside, one is transported to a seemingly ancient world of calm and meditation." Craftsmanship is a cherished heritage, tempered by years of rigorous apprenticeship. Kashmir is one contemporary society where even the youngest craftsperson is imbued with this same surreal search for perfection.

This quest and the glory of stylised Nature are reflected at their best in the Kashmiri *jamdani* shawl, in which embroidery and weaving used to be combined. Chain, stem and darning stitches worked together in a style similar to the Persian silk embroideries, and were amalgamated with *kani* shuttle weaving akin to the twill tapestry technique of Europe, as early as the fifteenth century, with *tojlis* or floating bobbins inserting the patterned weft threads through the warp. The Persian cypress tree became the Indian *ambi buta* motif and, ironically, was re-named by the British as Paisley, the name of a Scottish town which made machine-woven *jamewar* replicas!

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OF LIFE..."



As designs and variations of colour became more complicated, with many different motifs and colours incorporated in one shawl, different pieces were woven on different looms and then linked together by the *rafugar* with darn stitch embroidery of incredible fineness. The silk is hand spun from worms fed on special mulberry trees that grow in the Valley and hand dyed. In their heyday, Kashmir dyers produced a colour range of over three hundred different shades of yarn. An amusing example of their ingenuity and search for perfection is that, lacking a certain green, they boiled an English baize billiard tabletop to achieve it! Even today, it is not just master craftspeople that have a creative passion and pride in their craft. The dyer, the spinner, the pattern maker, the block carver – each is an artist, integral to the process.

The subtlety and skills and superb artistry of these extraordinary pieces can be seen in the miniatures of Mughal courtiers of the time, or gauged by contemporary European accounts. William Moorcroft, a gentleman traveller and unofficial agent of the East India Company, spent fourteen years in Kashmir and the Western Himalayas, studying the local crafts. He describes a shawl made up of a mind-boggling, one-thousand-and-five-hundred separate pieces!



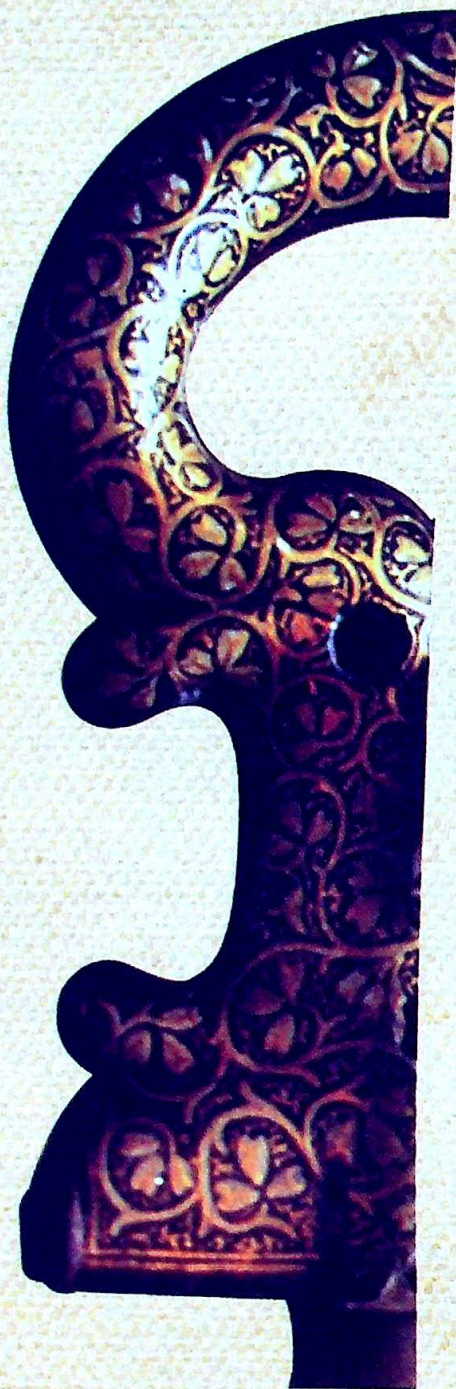
It was an Armenian merchant, Khwaja Yusuf, in the early nineteenth century, who initially devised the idea of translating the intricately woven shawls into embroidered ones. One woven shawl could take as many as eighteen months to weave. Seeing the international demand, he brought embroiderers from Constantinople to train the local craftsmen to replicate woven designs into embroidery. The new medium resulted in a new flowering of motif and design – flowing arabesques of bud, branch and blossom.

Both woven *kani* and *amlidar* embroidered shawls, done in a variety of minute stitches – *sozni* (aptly derived from the word for ‘small blossom’), *kanidar*, *raizkar*, *watchiken*, *ari* – are still part of the diverse range of Kashmiri crafts in which crewel-work tapestry, beaten and chased copper, *papier-mâché*, silver jewellery and walnut wood carving, all reflect the beauty and range of the Kashmir landscape – the flash of kingfisher blue, the flames and golds of *chinar* leaves in autumn, almond blossom and iris.

Craft flourishes in domestic interiors – as furniture, carpets, wall hangings and utensils that are used by everyone. Women wear their own embroideries, and while Khwaja Naqshband’s tomb near the Jama Masjid may be a supreme example of *khatamband*, ceilings of homes and houseboats are ornamented even today with similar geometric panels of intricately carved pinewood. Lanes in the old city abound with shops lined with *naqash* work copperware made for the local market – *samovars*, bowls, plates and trays, engraved or embossed with stylised floral or calligraphic motifs, oxidised to stand out in relief. Weight not skill determines prices!

The enduring techniques and prosperity the local crafts have brought to the Kashmir valley, also reflect the artistic sensitivity and awareness of their fifteenth century ruler, Zain-ul-Abidin. Known as the Akbar of Kashmir, Zain-ul-Abidin had seen the splendours of Samarkand as a prisoner in his youth. On his return to Kashmir, he encouraged and developed local skills; luring master craftspeople from Persia, Damascus and the Middle East as trainers, and importing raw materials from all over the world.





In *papier-mâché*, for instance, the varnish base was from the resin of local plants, aloe and storax; the brushes from the hair of the same *pashm* goat from which the famous shawls are woven; the many glued layers of fine paper came from the forested Kashmiri hills; and the glowing colours combined ultramarine from Yarkhand, white lead from Russia and verdigris from Britain.

From Emperor Ashoka who ruled in the third century BC and brought the gentle and rational humanism of Buddhism, to Hindu rule in the sixth century under Vikramaditya of Ujjain, to annexation by the Mughals in 1568, to the gradual infiltration of the Valley by the British and tourism, to the present day stand-off between those who see

Kashmir as part of the larger Indian Republic and those who pine for independence – Kashmir has seen it all – yet, somehow, kept its own unique quality.

The French traveller Bernier's account in 1665 might almost have been written today: "They (the Kashmiris) were very active and industrious. The workmanship and beauty of their *palkeys* (palanquins), bedsteads, trunks, inkstands, boxes, spoons and various other things were quite remarkable, and articles of their manufacture are in use in every part of the Indies. They perfectly understand the art of varnishing and are eminently skilful in closely imitating the beautiful veins of a certain wood, by inlaying with gold threads so delicately wrought that I never saw anything more elegant or perfect."

It is the carpets of Kashmir that, of all its crafts, are most representative of Indian craftsmen taking foreign skills and making them triumphantly their own. The Indian tradition was of pile-less, coarse cotton or wool *durries*; striped or with simple diamonds and lozenges. The Saracens brought the art of pile carpet weaving, the Persians – the Tree of Life, *mehrab*, vase and floral medallion designs. But it was Indian hands and pattern makers that, in John Irwin's words: "Using the grammar and motifs of Persian ornaments, employed a rhythm and a bold contrast of forms which are characteristically Indian."

New forms and permutations of ornamentation emerged, with nature rather than the more traditional Islamic geometric and calligraphic motifs as their inspiration. Craftspeople, freed by Akbar's liberal edicts from the constraints of the injunction against the depiction of natural and human forms, took creative flight. The flowering lushness of Kashmiri craft motifs, stylised and re-interpreted, echoes the verdant landscape that encompasses it – whether in a *pashmina* shawl, a *papier-mâché* bowl or a walnut wood carved chest of drawers. A felted *namda* or *gabba* – worked with charmingly *naif* crewel wool embroidered animals and figures, flora and fauna – has the same stamp of the Valley as a silk carpet.

Carpet-making reached its heights with the famous Mughal *shikargarh* hunting design silk carpets with



twelve hundred knots in a square inch. But, even today in Kashmir, every street has its work place where rows of rosy cheeked young boys deftly tie knots in time with the pattern makers sing-song chant of the *talim*, and silk carpets of three or four hundred knots are not uncommon.

All over Kashmir, most skilled weavers are still Muslims; clinging to century-old family occupations even when family members who have crossed the border have long given them up. It supports one's feeling that there is something in the Indian air and its cultural ambience (despite the occasional 'craze for forrun') that encourages craftsmanship and the creation of traditional beautiful things!

Nevertheless, craft in Kashmir is threatened. Not by the loss of skill, or lack of craftspeople, but by the absence of enlightened patronage that would keep creativity and art alive. The trippers on cut-price package tours, who are the only visitors to Kashmir these days, want cheap knickknacks, not priceless art. Kashmiris, themselves, are selling lurid machine-made Ludhiana imitations of Kashmiri embroidered *pashminas*. *Papier-mâché*, once used to craft the thrones and screens of emperors and Mughal court *howdahs* and palanquins, is today piled on every pavement and street corner – baubles for a Christmas tree, tawdry pillboxes and napkin rings. Jan Mohammad, with whom I began this story, has just got a job as watchman in the Public Works Department.

Craftsmen, generally illiterate, keep no records of what their forefathers made. The skills are on their fingertips. And if you paint Mickey Mouse, to order, on a *papier-mâché* box often enough instead of a Mughal rose, eventually, even the memory of the rose will fade away. Lovers of craft and Kashmir will pray that the gunfire ends, and true connoisseurs return to the Valley.




By Laila Tyabji, Founder Member and Chairperson of DASTKAR, an NGO working with crafts and craftspeople all over India. She has worked in the craft and development sector for over 30 years. A challenging recent intervention has been in Kashmir, working with women victims of terrorist insurgency, using embroidery as a catalyst for social and emotional recovery. She has studied art in India and Japan and worked as a freelance designer in textiles, graphics and theatre. She writes and speaks regularly on craft, design and social issues.

Above photograph: Maryam Khatun







# PARADISE *in* PARADISE







*"...the whole surface of the ground is grass and trefoil, so much so that to lay a carpet on it would be superfluous and in bad taste..."*

Memoirs of Jahangir

THE NATURAL WONDERS OF THE KASHMIR VALLEY INSPIRED THE MUGHALS TO CREATE GARDENS THAT ARE ACKNOWLEDGED TO be amongst the most beautiful in the world. They represent the final blossoming of a tradition stretching back centuries to the crafts of horticulture, water management and, indeed, carpet weaving in Persia and Central Asia. Their aesthetic significance lies beyond the sum of their elements, visually enticing as these are. Examined in a certain way, they offer lessons for contemporary design and, at a philosophic level, insight into the relationship between man and nature.

## CARPETS

The formal garden spreads like an enormous exquisitely patterned carpet. In Kashmir, it seems to unroll gently down the hillside to the lake-edge, taking companionably with it the rippling, cascading waters channelled from a natural spring.

Carpet imagery fits in well with the gardens belonging to the Persian tradition, from ancient pre-Islamic times to the great garden achievements between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries in Persia and in the Mughal gardens in India.

The art and craft of carpet weaving (and of garden-making) is more than two thousand years old in the Persian region. The idea of the garden carpet, with its accurate but graphically stylised depiction of the familiar *chahar-bagh*, establishes an interesting connection between the essentially outdoor practice of horticulture and the craft of indoor furnishing, a relationship which is probably unique amongst the major gardening traditions of the world. Poetry about both gardens and carpets speaks of them in the same idiom, imagining the carpet as a garden and vice versa. It suggests a conceptual interweaving of the interior and the exterior, quite different from and beyond the usual theory about interactions between indoor space and outdoor landscape, confined as that may be to mundanely literal considerations of physical and visual proximity.

The most famous and perhaps also the earliest documented garden carpet is known as the Baharestan or Spring Carpet, commissioned by the Sassanian Shahanshah Khusrow (AD 531-579) for the main audience hall of the Palace at Ctesiphon (in what is now Iraq). It was 140 m long and 27 m wide. It is described in Arab writings of the period (c. AD 637): "The design of the carpet was the plan of a royal pleasure garden or paradise. It represented beds of spring flowers and blossoming trees divided by paths and water flowing in channels. There was a broad border all around and here again were beds of bright coloured flowers. The yellow ground in this wonderful piece was of gold thread. The leaves of trees and flowers were of silk. Fruits were inlaid with polished stones; the water channels were crystals, the blossoms were precious stones..."<sup>1</sup>





## POETRY OF REFUGE

The poem 'Ode to a Garden Carpet' by an unknown Sufi poet (c. AD 1500), quoted by Nader Ardalan and Laleh Bakhtiar,<sup>2</sup> outlines specifically the aesthetic that guides both garden and carpet:

*Here in this carpet lives an ever lovely spring,  
Unscorched by summer's ardent flame,  
Safe too from autumn's boisterous gales,  
Is gaily blooming still,*

*The handsome wide border is the garden wall  
Protecting, preserving the Park within  
For refuge and renewal: a magic space  
For concourse, music and rejoicing,  
For contemplation's lonely spell -  
Conversations grave or lover's shy disclosure...*

Ephemeral, fragile, susceptible to the slightest adversity of weather, the garden changes, dies even. But the carpet is always there, a stable base, offering the comfort of predictability, a permanent garden. When living gardens have gone, their memory remains, safely documented in the myriad knots of these magic carpets, available to posterity, for inspiration certainly and, perhaps, for replication as well.

As the poet says, in a later verse:

*From all these perils here at last set free,  
In the Garden all find security...*

And in another recognition of the Persian garden as a symbol of refuge, Vita Sackville-West<sup>3</sup> describes the meaning of these gardens in the lands of their origin:

"For days, even weeks, you must ride with no shade, and the sun overhead and nothing but the bleached bones of dead animals strewn the track. Then, when you come to trees and running water, you will call it a garden. It will not be flowers and their garishness that your eyes crave for, but a green cavern full of shadows and pools..."

## GENESIS AND FORM

Quranic quotations are usually presented as the inspiration behind the form and content of these gardens, often attributing a guide book or manual-like specificity to the descriptions cited and, in that sense, making a case for what is now conventionally accepted as the 'Islamic' garden – supposedly a designed landscape derived from divine injunctions.



But is that really what a Persian or Mughal garden is? The Persian garden tradition precedes the advent of Islam, and the descriptions of paradise are general enough to permit the conjecture that their language purposely suggests an idiom, even physical examples, which might have been already familiar to the natives of the region. This, for them to better visualise the beauties of the heaven that await them. Could it not be that an already extant form or practice developed and evolved whilst acquiring religious sanction and encouragement?

In Sufi symbolism,<sup>4</sup> the Garden denotes Paradise, God's creative power, beauty and, significantly, life itself. Imaginary or real, Heaven is the final refuge. On a sublime plane, the creators of these gardens were engaged in a quest for the representation of a version of paradise on earth. Simple enough to achieve in the harshness of arid wildernesses where a walled retreat with water runnels and fruit trees would readily provide heavenly relief... but in the salubrious paradise of the Kashmir valley – to create a paradise garden in paradise?

"...[in] Kashmir, the remarkable achievement of the Mughals was that they responded to the new conditions. Less imaginative men might have continued to build closely-walled gardens on exactly the same pattern as their ancestors... the garden walls [were] modified from the complete barrier of the Persian originals to allow landscape and garden to drift into each other."<sup>5</sup>

In fact, a very deliberate connection was made – down the hillside from the mountain to the lake, there was an axis of flowing water and cascades to which all other arrangements of space and tree masses (the massive *chinars*) were secondary.

Each garden celebrates the beauty of its larger setting.

## GARDEN PROSPECTS

Broadly speaking, courtyards, gardens and garden prospects formed the main typology of built open space in these times. The term 'garden prospect' may sound unfamiliar, but this is what the gardens at the edges of the valley at Pinjore and Kashmir reveal themselves to be – gardens of course but, most significantly, as places from which vistas to the regional landscape are framed.

The courtyard draws attention to the walls and verandahs which enclose it. The walled garden directs attention away from its walls, displaying its attractions – intricately arranged water runnels and pools, fountains, flourishing fruit and flowering plants. The garden prospect or Mughal pleasure garden, linearly rectangular rather than square in plan, includes these features to a superlative degree but, in a fascinating paradox, through the particular assembly of its lines and spaces, suggests that we actually look away and beyond, to a very special view of the world.





## A JOURNEY

Would it be over-imaginative to interpret a short journey through one of these gardens, say Nishat or Shalimar, as analogous to life? Not if you agree that every garden has a story to tell. This story takes us from one world (*the world?*) to another, and then reveals our world (our life?) in a new and surprising way. There are three steps in the narrative. First, the entry through a gate from the road outside to the lowermost terrace – from the everyday bustle, noise and chaos to immediate quietude. Then the progress, along a lively stream up a series of generous terraces, each presenting contrasts of deeply shaded groves and sunlit meadows and visual delights, splashed with drifts of colour from seasonal flowers and, all the time, the all-pervading music of flowing water, the breeze and birdsong. It is paradise, and it is also a vision of life.

The third step is the arrival at the highest terrace, the hill towering above. Turning around and looking back, a visual traverse of the glittering stream rushing towards the lake registers not the detail of the garden, marvellous as it is, but directs the vision to another, more spectacular view, in the void framed by garden, water and sky – the other paradise (of the Valley) beyond.

In sum, one proceeds *from* the world to the world of the garden, at once symbolic of paradise and also of life. It is easily understood because its forms are stylised idealisations of the rural landscape – fields, orchards and irrigation channels – and at the point when it is expected that the experience is complete, looking back over the ground covered reveals the real purpose of the design – to take the visitor beyond the confines of this man-made paradise, liberating him, in spirit at least, to a manifestation of Divine creativity represented by the natural landscape of the Kashmir valley.

The garden is like a prayer carpet aligned to the *qibla*, but the object of homage is nature itself.

*The Beloved's face at last we see,  
And there attain our journey's end,  
Our life's reward and final Destiny –  
Refuge and fulfilment in His Infinity.*  
Concluding lines from – 'Ode to a Garden Carpet'

## LESSONS

What do we learn from these masterworks of landscape design?

A garden is a place to look at, and also a place to look out from, in the best tradition of defensible space, offering prospect as well as refuge. A prospect to know where you are in the schemes of the world, and a refuge to retreat in safety and shelter when the environment is hostile, exactly in the manner that early man learned to sustain himself in a barbaric world.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps we don't look carefully enough at absence: do not these great gardens suggest that there is aesthetics of emptiness?<sup>7</sup> As an element of design, the void is valuable; it enables the extension of vision. Like a vacuum it can draw aesthetic energy from the surrounding landscape. And above all, ultimately, there is only the sky, the earth and the view beyond. All the rest, as Sufi symbolism would have it, is foam.



Our garden is filled with nightingales  
 The crows have flown away  
 Now we can see the flowers of your garden

Like a lily we come out of ourselves  
 Like a babbling brook  
 we dance from one paradise to the next  
 RUMI: *In the Arms of the Beloved* – translated by Jonathan Star




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By Mohammad Shabeer, who has taught and practised landscape architecture in Delhi since 1976. He is especially interested in historic gardens and has recently been associated with the conservation and improvement works undertaken by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture for the Humayun's Tomb gardens in Delhi and the Baghe-Babur in Kabul.





# Persian Threads In The Tapestry Of Kashmir

Kalhana, the great Indian historian writes about  
Kashmir, his native land:

*"It is a country where the sun shines  
mildly, being the place created by  
Rishi Kashyap, for his glory big  
and lofty houses, learning, saffron,  
icy cool waters and grapes rare  
in heaven, are plentiful here...  
Kailash is the best place in the  
three worlds. Himalayas is the  
best place in Kailash and Kashmir  
the best place in the Himalayas."*



## KASHMIR CAME UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF PERSIAN CULTURE IN

the fourteenth century. Muslims came to Kashmir in small groups and the first person who brought Islam to Kashmir and spread it was Syed Bulbul Shah Soharwardi Turkistani. He came to Kashmir in AD 1347 and with him came the Persian language and culture. After him, the only important event worth mentioning of the Valley was the arrival of Saiyid Ali Hamadani. He came to Kashmir with seven hundred Sufis and scholars of Hamadan in AD 1396. These were the two Sufis who brought Islamic culture to Kashmir and showed light to the people. Kashmiri Sufis did not merely propagate religion; they were also scholars in their own right. They established *madrastas* and monasteries to disseminate knowledge in the region.

A direct relation between Persia and Kashmir was established during the Shahmiri period (AD 1349-1561). Emperors Qutubuddin, Sikander and Zainul Abedin were especially famous for their patronage of language and literature in the Valley, and Persian flourished during the reign of these emperors. The first Islamic school, the 'Dar ul Ulum' was established in Srinagar during the reign of Emperor Qutubuddin and a number of Persian scholars and poets came and settled in Kashmir. Also, Kashmiri writers began to write poetry as well as religious and scholarly books in Persian. In the medieval period, Persian became very popular in Kashmir for it was already well known to Kashmiri scholars through the traders, travellers and scholars hailing from the Persian speaking countries. From then on, Kashmir produced many poets and writers of Persian. Both, the Kashmiri Muslims and Hindus alike, produced creative works and literary masterpieces which became jewels in the crown of the Persian language and, for the same reason, Kashmir came to be known as 'Iran e Sagheer' (Iran Minor).

Zainul Abedin worked hard to popularise the Persian language throughout his kingdom. He established a university at Nowshera in Srinagar, under the guidance of Mullah Ahmad Kashmiri. A bureau of translation was also established by him where several Persian books were rendered into Sanskrit and several Sanskrit books

were translated into Persian. Such activity during his long reign of half a century brought about a renaissance of culture and literature in the Valley. Some of its results were: the translation of Jami's *Yusuf o Zulaikha* into Sanskrit by Shivara, the counsellor of the Badshah – the translation of *Jainaprakasha* into the Kashmiri language by the Sanskrit scholar Yodabhata, who had learnt Firdausi's *Shahnama* and the *Mahabharata* by heart – and the translation of *Rajtarangini* as *Bahr ul Asmar* into Persian by the poet Maulana Ahmad. Several books of history were produced in Kashmir during different periods; these had great importance in Persian literature. The most famous among them is *Rajtarangini* written by Kalhana. According to critics and historians, it is the biggest and the first history of Kashmir written in Persian.

Chak rule began in Kashmir in AD 1561. The Chak emperors were also great patrons of art and learning. Some great scholars like Mullah Nami Sami and Mullah Mahdi were products of this period; Sheikh Yaqub Sarfi and Baba Daud Khaki were the two eminent Sufi poets and scholars of the later Chak period.

In AD 1589, Akbar the Great conquered Kashmir. When Akbar first visited the Valley, Abul Fadl thus reported:

"His imperial majesty was presented a number of *qasidas* from the poets who accompanied him."

Faiydi, Akbar's Poet Laureate, also recited a *qasida* on this occasion with these opening lines:

"A thousand caravans of desire are making a night attack on Kashmir... to throw open the banquet of her festivity."

Mughal emperors made the Valley their favourite summer resort and, undoubtedly, the people of Kashmir enjoyed peace and prosperity. The Mughals took a keen interest in the welfare of the masses. A network of communication began as soon as the Mughals evinced their interest in Kashmir. They made Kashmir a summer retreat as well as a pleasure ground and, simultaneously, the Mughal garden began to appear on the map of north India.



The fame of the Valley as 'Paradise on earth' spread throughout the country and throngs of people visited this part of Mughal India. But it was during the time of Jahangir that the beauty of the Valley attracted tens and thousands of visitors. He claimed that the valley of Kashmir was a paradise on earth and he made it so by laying down many gardens. It was during his reign that the gardens – Shalimar, Chasm e Shahi, Naseem Bagh and Nishat were built on the banks of the Dal Lake. He laid many gardens and *serais* enroute from Lahore to Srinagar. Perhaps no other ruler has ever paid so much tribute to the beauty of Kashmir as did Jahangir. When he was on his deathbed, he was asked if he wanted anything. He replied that *his wish was to die in Kashmir*. Jahangir was fond of poetry and painting and liked to spend time in the company of scholars. He was highly fascinated by the natural beauty of Kashmir, hummed by Persian poets.

Shah Jahan also had an equal fascination for Kashmir. The generous patronage of the Mughal court proved conducive to the growth of art and literature. Owing to the long, peaceful rule of the above three Mughal kings, hundreds of people came to Kashmir to find mental peace, regain their health or attain spiritual salvation. Kashmir provided probably the most congenial atmosphere for independent and creative men of letters to pursue their goals.

Dara Shikoh, too, took interest in the Valley and stayed there most of the time. He was a man of Sufi temperament, having been influenced by a Sufi of the Qadiri order, Mian Mir – the saint of Lahore, who laid the foundation of the Sikh Golden Temple in Amritsar. Mullah Shah, who was the mentor of Dara Shikoh and Jahan Ara Begum, at the instance of Mian Mir, had settled in Kashmir and built there a garden house for himself. Mullah Shah spent his summers in Kashmir and winters in Lahore. His spiritual fame attracted the Mughal prince Dara Shikoh and his sister Jahan Ara Begum to his mystic fold. Dara Shikoh built the famous garden and observatory of Pari Mahal, overlooking the Dal Lake in Kashmir, for Mullah Shah to



meditate in his summer residence. He also built a mosque on Hari Parbat for his Pir. Gopal Gandhi, who is a writer of the play *Dara Shikoh*, has depicted the eternal beauty of Pari Mahal and Dal Lake in these words:

Take our divine Pari Mahal  
Mist-veiled, in Srinagar,  
That monument ethereal  
Which overlooks the Dal from a spur.

Within the Lake's placid waters  
Murders take place by the minute,  
Fish eat fish; are eaten by others  
Violence marks every thing in it.

Dara Shikoh made seminal contribution to the Indian composite culture. He had an interest in intellectual and spiritual matters and wrote – *Majma ul Bahrain* in Persian and *Samundra-Sangam* in Sanskrit – wherein he





mentioned the similarity between Hinduism and Islam so as to bring one closer to the other. He translated the *Upanishads* into Persian and named it *Sirr-Akbar* or the 'Great Secret'. He wrote these books in the calm environment of Pari Mahal. His writings indicate that Dara Shikoh was a man of literary taste, with the vision to unite the Hindus and Muslims in the subcontinent.

A galaxy of poets began to appear on the firmament of Kashmir in the successive periods of Indian history. If the poets of Kashmir are to be discussed, then they should be divided as those who belonged to Kashmir (both Hindu and Muslim poets) and those who came to Kashmir from Iran. In *Tazkarah e Shoara e Kashmir* written by Syed Hisamuddin Rashidi on the poets of Kashmir, the writer has mentioned three hundred Hindu and Muslim poets of Kashmir. He wrote about their lives and also quoted fragments from their poetry. The most eminent poet of Persian in Kashmir was Ghani. Ghani Kashmiri, in his lifetime, became very famous due to his superb poetry and the Persians acknowledged him as one of the

greatest masters of Persian poetry in the subcontinent. His philosophical poetry prompted Saib, a famous Persian poet, to travel from Iran to Kashmir to see Ghani and get a deeper insight into his philosophy. On his arrival, the Persian poet went to meet Ghani a number of times but was disappointed to find the doors of his house locked. He did not give up his mission and on one occasion found them open. With great enthusiasm he went in but found Ghani missing and the house without any inmate. Ultimately, through some local contact, Saib succeeded in meeting him. He inquired about the logic of locking the doors when Ghani himself was inside and keeping them open when he was not at home. To this the reply was:

"I am the only treasure in this house. In order to protect this treasure the doors have to be locked. Once the treasure is not in the house there is no need to lock its doors."

Ghani Kashmiri's poetry, because of its artistic merits, has a distinct place in the entire annals of Persian literature.

Kashmir's lush green valley and, more importantly, the patronage provided by the Indian rulers were the major reasons that attracted Iranian poets to India. The most famous among these was Baba Talib Isfahani. He came to Kashmir in the beginning of the Chak rule and enjoyed the liberal patronage of all the Chak kings for thirty years. According to *Ain e Akbari*, he was a 'thoughtful man and experienced in political matters'. His poems are noted for their grace, ease, simplicity and pathos.

Haji Mohammad Jan Qudsi, who hailed from Mashad, was Shah Jahan's *Malik us Shoara* (Poet Laureate). He wrote several *mathnavis* (epic poems) in praise of Kashmir. These are some lines from the *qasida* (ode) that earned him a robe of honour in the court of Shah Jahan:

O! Pen wax great out of joy and open thy tongue.

In praise of the Qibla of religion the second lord  
of conjunctions.

Honour of creation the Kaba of truth and purity  
The Qibla of good fortune, the Khaqan of the age;

Shah Jahan.



Abu Talib Kalim became court poet after the death of Qudsi. Kalim accompanied Shah Jahan on one of his visits to Kashmir and he was so charmed by the beauty of the place that he requested the king to allow him to remain there for the rest of his life.

*One can call it a second paradise in this sense  
That whoever quits this garden repents.*

Mullah Tughra was also a renowned Persian poet and prose writer. He spent his last days in Kashmir and died there in 1078 AH. Tughra is admired in India more for his prose than for his poetry. He was a prolific poet and wrote in all metres and styles. He had twenty-five *risalas* to his credit including those related to Kashmir. The first one – ‘Firdausiyah’ (paradise), contains a description of the beautiful land of Kashmir. The second – ‘Tajallyat’ (manifestation), is a treatise in praise of Kashmir. And the last – ‘Tadad ul Nawadir’ has a description of the eight stages of the road leading to Kashmir.

Of these poets, it is important to mention one Iranian poetess whose name was Hafeeza Marium. She lived during the Mughal period and was brought up in Kashmir. According to historians, she was the teacher of Zaibul Nisa, the daughter of Aurangzeb. It is said that Zaibul Nisa’s intellect was a result of Hafeeza’s influence.

There is a cemetery in Srinagar called ‘Mazar us Shoara’ (that is, tombs of poets) in which six Iranian poets were buried but about whom very little is known. They were poets who came to India during different periods of time and were appreciated and patronised by the rulers of India. These six poets were: Mohammad Mashuzzaman Abul Fateh Gilani, Qudsi Mashaidi, Mohammad Quli Salim, Abu Talib Kalim, Mullah Tughra Mashaidi and Qazi Zadah. The cemetery assumes much significance since several good poets were buried there, but the people of Kashmir nay, of India and Iran, are unaware of this fact.

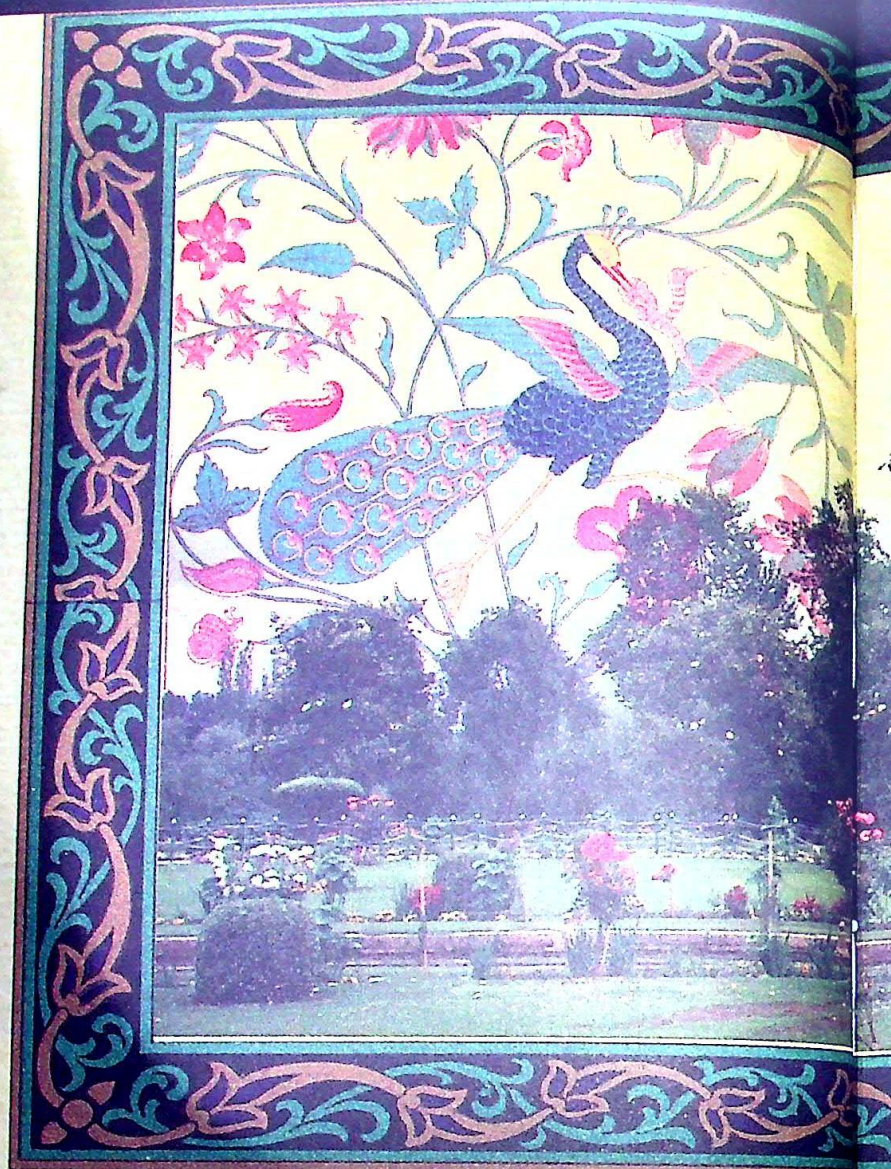
Kashmir’s beauty and serenity were the major factors that attracted scholars and poets who went and settled there

and wrote a great deal of poetry in praise of the Valley. Kalim Kashani epitomises the perfect beauty of Kashmir as a place of joy for all and for ever:

*Unrest sky! Why are you upset?  
This is Kashmir and look at the Kashmir  
Full of flowers, plains, mountains and mountain slopes  
Look! You will find thousands and thousands  
of orchids in one.*

Though Talib Amuli, a poet in Jahangir’s court, had never visited the Valley, his poems on Kashmir are superb and ‘speaking pictures’:

*Come, the abode of charm and beauty is here  
Which excels in pride and coquetry  
We shall not set out of Kashmir  
We love to stay in a place of pleasure  
and this is the place for us.*







Dr Muhammad Iqbal wrote many Persian poems in praise of Kashmir, the land of his ancestors. In his ode to Kashmir he says:

*It appears that the annex of lofty Paradise  
Has been constructed in the lap of these mountains  
This is His great blessing to mankind.  
So that man can enter into heaven  
without further waiting for a long time*

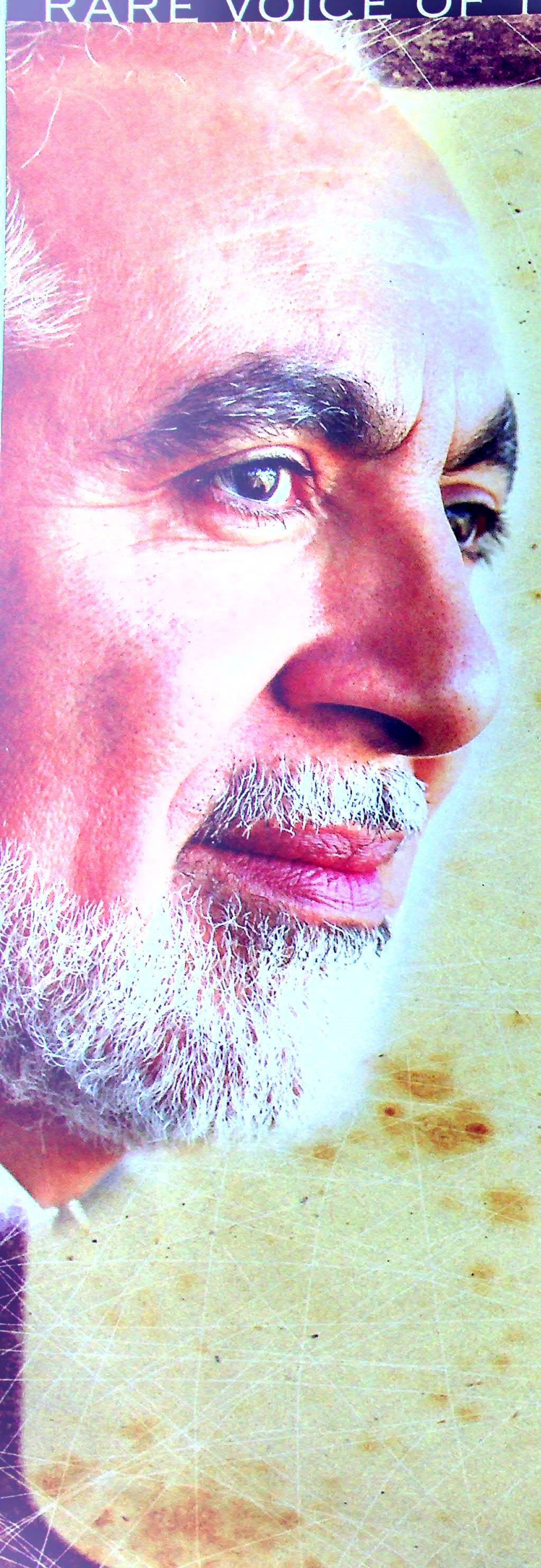
Fourteenth century on, Kashmir has become a cradle of Indo-Persian culture. Artists, poets, Sufis and scholars from Persia or Central Asia have rushed to Kashmir with their art and expertise, and enriched the cultural fabric of the Valley. They have infused a new life in the Indian society of Kashmir by establishing carpet and paper industries. Besides, it has also become a land of Persian poetry and Sufi thoughts – where one can hear the most beautiful of songs ever composed in Persian. Yes, over the centuries, a Persian thread has become the quaint essence in the tapestry of Kashmir.

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# RARE VOICE OF TRUTH



IMAM FEISAL RAUF IS IMAM OF THE AL FARAH MOSQUE IN TRIBECA, NEW YORK, TWELVE BLOCKS FROM GROUND ZERO. HIS AUDIENCES COMPRISE PEOPLE FROM ALL CREEDS, ALL NATIONALITIES AND ALL AGES.

AN EGYPTIAN, BORN IN KUWAIT AND EDUCATED IN ENGLAND AND MALAYSIA, THE IMAM HAS A DEGREE IN PHYSICS FROM COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY IN NEW YORK CITY.

IMAM FEISAL'S DISTINCTIONS ARE LEGION.

AS FOUNDER OF ASMA, AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR MUSLIM ADVANCEMENT AND CHAIRMAN OF THE CORDOBA INITIATIVE, IMAM FEISAL LEADS MANY INITIATIVES THAT PROMOTE RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND THE INTEGRATION OF ISLAM IN MODERN SOCIETY. HE FURTHERS HIS WORK INTERNATIONALLY IN A NUMBER OF WAYS, INCLUDING THROUGH HIS MEMBERSHIP IN THE WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM'S COUNCIL OF 100 LEADERS.

HIS BOOKS, *A SEARCH FOR MEANING* AND *A SACRED LAW* (WHAT EVERY MUSLIM SHOULD KNOW ABOUT SHARIAH) AND *WHAT'S RIGHT WITH ISLAM*, ARE WIDELY ACCLAIMED AND SHOULD BE ESSENTIAL READING FOR ANYONE REMOTELY INTERESTED IN THE FUTURE OF THE WORLD AND HUMAN UNDERSTANDING.

ERUDITION AND ELOQUENCE MEET IN IMAM FEISAL, MAKING HIM THE MOST SOUGHT AFTER AUTHORITY AT INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES, WHETHER THE WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, THE YOUNG PRESIDENTS' ORGANIZATION, OR THE COUNCIL OF FOREIGN RELATIONS. TURNING TO HIM REGULARLY FOR HIS EDIFYING VIEWS AND WISDOM ARE THE WASHINGTON POST, NEW YORK TIMES, TIME MAGAZINE, BBC, CNN, NBC, NY DAILY NEWS, JERUSALEM POST AND ASSOCIATED PRESS. THE LIST GROWS.

THE IMAM PREACHES IN MANY FORA TO CREATE PEACE AND UNDERSTANDING AMONG PEOPLE WHICH HE BELIEVES IS THE MISSION AND INSPIRATION OF ALL RELIGIONS.



IMAM FEISAL RAUF IS THE VOICE OF ISLAM THAT REPRESENTS AUTHENTICITY ITSELF. TO ARRIVE AT A SPIRITUAL DESTINATION OF THE TRUE AND DEEP BELIEVER AFTER HAVING TROD THE PATH OF KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM IN VARIOUS FIELDS AND IN DISSIMILAR GEOGRAPHIES, MAKES HIM A COUNSEL THE WORLD SHOULD ESPECIALLY HEED.

A more universal attention to him would surely make for saner perspectives to reappear. All those who have heard him at the Tribeca Mosque in New York, who know of his Cordoba Initiative and his work with the young Muslim Leaders of Tomorrow, tend to hang on his every word.

IMAM FEISAL, THE ESTEEMED AUTHORITY ON A SUBJECT THAT HAS SEIZED THE WORLD, SHARES WITH SYEDA BILGRAMI IMAM HIS VIEWS, HIS HOPES AND THE WAY FORWARD THAT HE HIMSELF HAS EVOLVED.

*What made you, a student and a man of science, turn to the practice and preaching of religion in a highly committed and serious manner? What attracted you most to the idea and why?*

Religion and religious philosophy have always attracted me and were part of my father and grandfather's tradition, so I often feel that DNA had something to do with it. Thinking through the existential questions of our individual and collective purpose in life fascinated me. I studied science and mathematics because I didn't want to feel unqualified to understand any aspect of human thought and also because, when I grew up, science was to a large extent regarded in the West as the 'new religion'. So being able to understand that area and to debate its pluses and minuses was integral to being a man of religion in the Islamic sense; for, after all, if we accept that God created the universe, then to understand the universe scientifically is in a real way seeking to understand God's handiwork.

*What made you pursue this in America rather than anywhere else? If you were to start again, would you do it differently?*

I came to America for the same reasons I grew up in England, Egypt and Malaysia. My father, a graduate and later an employee of al-Azhar University in Egypt, was sent by al-Azhar to these countries. The work places of his life determined and shaped to a large degree my own lifeline and destiny. Of course, as a believer, I believe none of this was accidental but part of God's plan, so if it were all to start again, I don't believe anything would be different.





*Does it not fascinate you that in Kashmir it was the Brahmins who turned to Islam and Buddhism in large numbers? Indeed Allama Iqbal was a Kashmiri Pundit himself.*

*You must know of other instances in other parts of the world?*

Allama Iqbal's past is indeed interesting but it is not in the least surprising. In fact, the educated classes of many faiths have always been drawn to Islam and the Islamic thought because of our religion's strong emphasis on learning. For illustration, take the great Jewish philosophers and theorists of Muslim Spain whose work was openly encouraged by the atmosphere in which they lived.

*Who turns to you in America for Islamic instruction – do the young make a receptive audience in any special way?*

Islam is also as spiritually attractive as it is intellectually coherent. Religion attracts people because we are naturally configured to believe in God. That is what the Quranic term *din ul-fitrah* refers to – the natural religion that God has implanted in the human heart. And religion is about establishing our relationship with the Creator, our responsibility before Him within a timeline that extends beyond our own worldly lives, and how this informs our lives on earth. All this is fundamentally attractive to all human beings; so when you can speak about this from your own experience and relate it to the needs of others, you have their attention. And because this is how I speak about Islam, I find I am able to reach human souls from all parts of the world and of all age brackets.

*The curiosity about Islam has been acute after 9/11. How can we take it out of the shadow, the cloud that it is now darkened by in most parts of the world?*

I'm not sure that 9/11 is the correct lens through which to view Islam. Unfortunately, it means that as advocates of our religion's message of altruism and peace, we have much more work to do.

And although 9/11 and the media have made it challenging for many to be Muslim in modern America, I personally think this is part of God's testing of our faith; for what is this compared to what the Prophets, including our own Prophet, had to face in order to exercise their faith? But in fairness to America and its openness, a by-product of 9/11 and the media coverage about Islam has been a great amount of tangible curiosity – on the part of young people in particular – to find out more about Islam and those who practise according to its law.

One of the most important aspects of my work as Chairman of the Cordoba Initiative is the opportunity to present Islam to the Westerners as it truly is – an Abrahamic creed that champions devotion to others and to oneself as an expression of our devotion to God. Yes, our efforts to expose Muslim society as tolerant and peaceful are sometimes undermined by events, just as the Muslims' views of Western values are often obscured by Western foreign policy. We cannot, however, allow these mistaken perceptions to rule out cooperation between our world and the West.





*What are the reasons that Muslims invite ire not on the wrongdoer but on the religion?*

*Aren't you tempted to agree with Shaw when he said Islam was the greatest religion but its followers were the worst people?*

I have often thought about what it must be like to be God; what it must be like to teach human beings how to live, and to see how they refute what God sends down of wisdom through His Prophets and Messengers.

I also remember thinking once to myself, "If the worst people on earth can be transformed, then that transforming power must indeed be superior." We have witnessed many examples of how Islam has transformed people, cleaned them and made them better human beings. I think this helps partly to explain Shaw's remark about Islam as a transforming agency and why many Muslims fall short of their own faith's teachings.

Another thing is that one can be 'Muslim' in the liturgical, 'outer' sense and not in the ethical, inner sense: one can pray, pay the *zakat*, fast, go on pilgrimage and yet be a highly unethical person. This explains another aspect of Shaw's remark.

Moreover, Muslims today face many challenges. One of the largest that I see is our imperative to collaborate as coreligionists of different sects, schools, ethnicities, backgrounds and ages, to drown out the negativity propagated by those who falsely represent us. As an Imam, I work every day with spiritual individuals and families whose only desire is to lead a fulfilling life of opportunity and peace. As an activist, I have the pleasure of counting many spirited agents for positive change among my friends. In both of these roles, I interact with Muslims whose very existence refutes Shaw's comment, proving that our community loves peace as much as any other. It is this perspective that we must unveil to the world.

*In which part of the world would you say our religion is still pristine – or at its most humane? What would be the way to make that happen, let us say in the US or in India? In other words, is there a light at the end of our tunnel?*

When we talk of places likely to experience a 'revival' in classical Islamic values, I cannot help but notice their fascinating similarity with American society in particular. From a social contract that holds individual freedom as a God-given, inalienable right to a built-in appreciation for diversity, the intersection of American liberalism and classical Islamic thought is greater than what many assume.

Islamic history and legal thought bears out these similarities. As Islam spread from Western Arabia, its community of followers (*ummah*) grew into an increasingly diverse collection of cultures, peoples and nations. Islam's appeal derived mainly from the universality of the Muslim core observance (charity, prayer, fasting and pilgrimage) and the monotheistic Islamic creed (the *shahada*), whose



*simplicity created the space for a plurality of cultural, societal and legal norms – there is no god but God, and Mohammad is the prophet of God.*

The history of America reveals a similar plain appeal – the creed of liberty and the protections for religious diversity encoded in American culture, politics and law – serving also to bring newcomers into its pluralistic society. The United States is certainly exemplary in its encouragement of religious freedom, a practice that also clearly characterises much of Muslim tradition.

American liberalism's convergence with Muslim heterogeneity locates American Muslims uniquely in today's globalised world. American Muslims represent the diversity championed by both their own religious history and the heritage of the country in which they reside: a *permanent* cross-section of the global Muslim community replicated only *transiently* during the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. They reflect the full range of Muslim variety from the West African to East Asian, from the Sunni to Shiite, from the wealthy to the underprivileged.

Furthermore, with the flexibility permitted by its creed and open environment, America can catalyse the global process of *ijtihad* (Islamic legal interpretation) in the future just as it birthed new developments for other worldwide religions including Christianity, Judaism and Buddhism.

We now face a historic opportunity to re-establish the classical Islamic value of inter-cultural respect – just as Muslims have produced culturally Persian, South Asian, Indonesian and North African Islamic strains, American Muslims may now forge an analogous American expression of Islam. Thus equipped with the intellectual openness of American society, the American Muslim community is poised to revitalise Islam's pluralistic heritage and sensitivity to cultural context.

This is important because we live in an increasingly globalised world. From the US to India, people are becoming increasingly multi-cultural in outlook, in cuisine, in clothing, and so on. Thus the development of Islam in the West, and in America in particular, will have global repercussions.

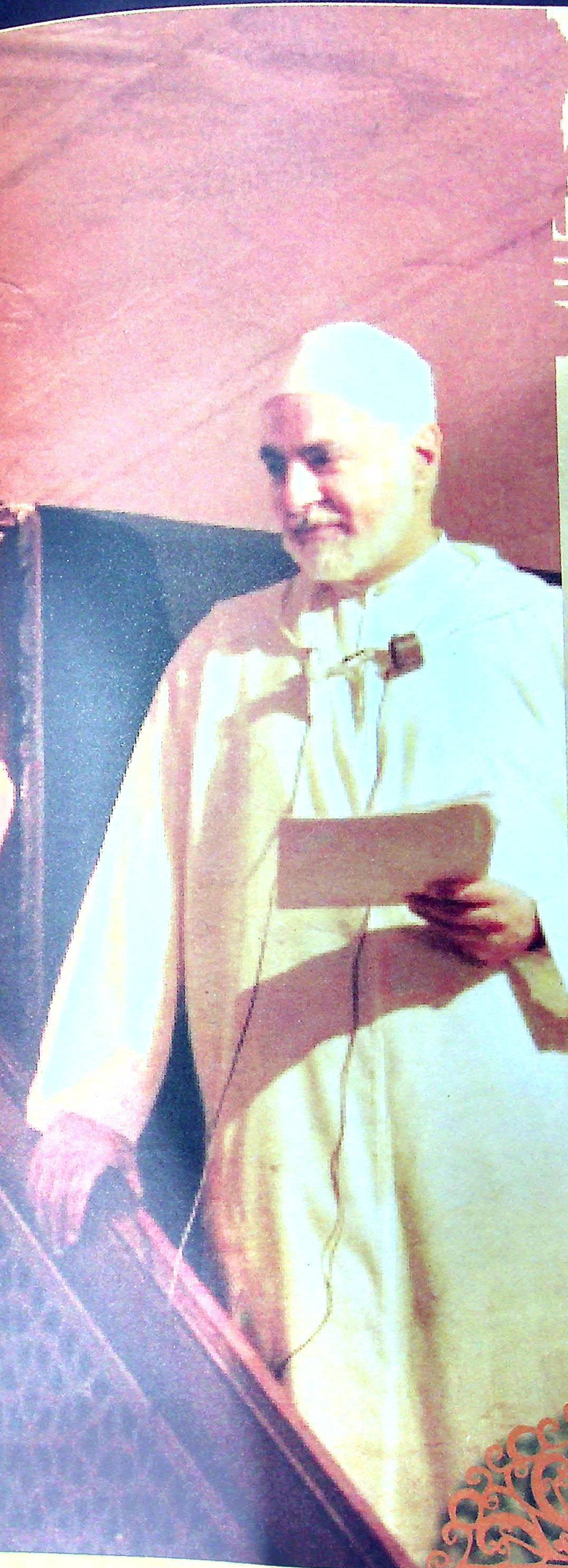
*What reform would you say the Islamic clergy would consider as acceptable reform? What would make them flinch? Why are they so averse? Does not the Quran say time and again that we must reflect on what is being said, which almost seems a prod towards reform?*

*Different regions / countries seem to represent very different degrees of orthodoxy.*

First we need to be clear on what we mean by the term 'reform'. I personally believe that it is people, the Muslims, who need to be reformed and not the faith itself – as you yourself pointed out in your earlier question of how even non-Muslims like Shaw differentiated between the excellence of Islam the faith and religion and that of the Muslims.

Moreover, since the beginning of Islamic history, Muslim scholars have unanimously agreed on a core set of beliefs that all Muslims have to accept [such as belief in God, the nature of God as omnipotent, all-Hearing, all-Knowing... accepting the Quran as truly God's Word, and so on] and areas wherein which there was and could be a diversity of opinion all within the embrace of Islamic orthodoxy. It is this latter area which allows for interpretation to suit certain aspects of Islamic law to different times, places and circumstances.





I, personally, have found that almost all the circumstances that we now find ourselves in have been looked at by Islamic scholars and jurists from the earliest of time – with the exception of new areas like bioethics resulting from new technology that has created novel dilemmas. What is, therefore, required is interpretation of the classic knowledge, applying it wisely to the particular circumstances we find ourselves in.

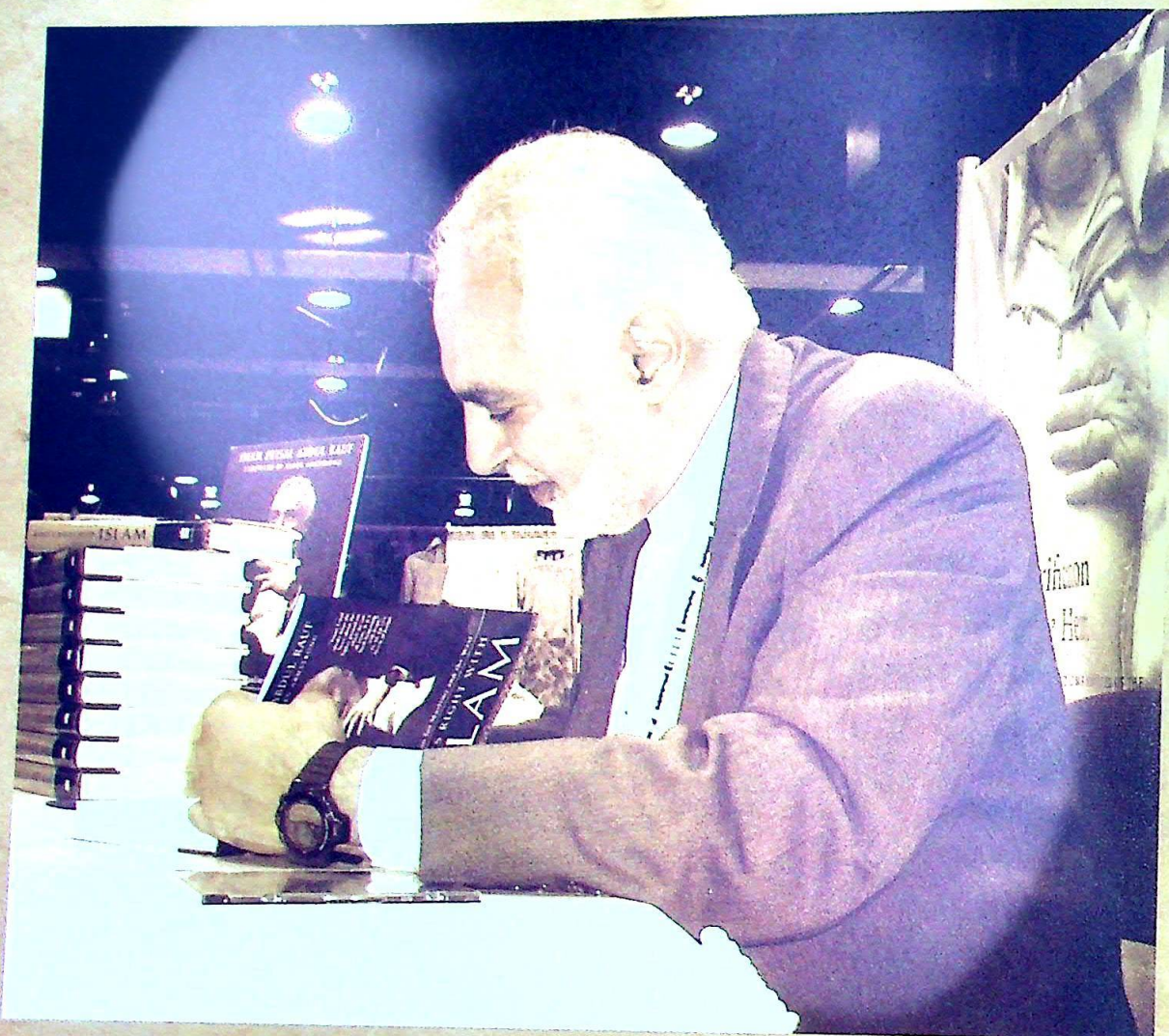
*Why is religion not about being good, any longer? It seems to be something else, about doing things in defined, specific ways.*

Of course religion is about being good; it has to be. But what most Muslims do not understand is that Muslim scholars and jurists developed an incredibly sophisticated corpus of Islamic thought, theology and jurisprudence: there exists a kind of 'grammar' to Islamic thought. This is an important part of our heritage, for it guarantees the continuity of Islamic thought at the highest level. And continuity of thought is important in all areas of human intellectual endeavour; it is as important in the physical sciences as it is important in religion, for this is what connects us across the centuries to our predecessors, our religious ancestors all the way to Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be upon Him).

*Would you agree with Sayyid Qutb when he says that Islam and all its injunctions must rule all of people's lives, unlike in Christianity and Judaism?*

There is a 'grammar' to Islamic thought, and just as grammar permeates all expressions of language, so one cannot speak or write ungrammatically, so does the 'grammar' of Islamic thought permeate all aspects of our lives. To say that this ethos permeates our lives is very different to saying it rules our lives.





*When I got very excited about having your book What's Right With Islam translated into Hindi and Urdu for India, a number of my peers calmed me down saying that the clergy here would get into the act of pronouncing you a 'Sufi Imam'. What is your comment on this? What would you say is the best use that this book has been put to thus far, and where? Does it work in the Arab world?*

*Why should one be so helpless in making our community stand up with their heads held high, confident, ready for life and excellence, anywhere in the world?*

My book has been translated into Indonesian and Arabic. The Indonesian translation was released in December 2007 in Jakarta, and the Arabic in January 2008 in Cairo. I did a five-day, three-city book tour in Indonesia and expect to do a book tour in Cairo sometime this year. My publishers expect the book to do well, as it has done in the US where it has been well received by all sectors of society, Muslim and non-Muslim. The Christian Science Monitor regarded it as among their top five non-fiction works in 2004, the year the hardback edition was released.

I would welcome seeing it translated into Hindi and Urdu for India, as Hindu-Muslim relations are an important part of my work. There will always be people who love to pigeonhole others. All I ask is for them to read my works and they will see that as an Imam and a Sufi, I am squarely within the orthodoxy of Islamic thought. I have written books on the Sharia for the lay English Muslim reader, and whatever I have done is based on the Quran and the Sunnah.

I can't agree with you more; we should help make our community stand up with our heads held high, confident, ready for life and excellence, anywhere in the world.



*In our country, the State is self-conscious in insisting on change because Muslims are a minority. This is seen as appeasement and actually works against the Muslims by igniting much backlash from other communities. Is it similar in the US and in different areas where Muslims live in large numbers?*

I'm not sure I understand the full context of your question.

There has been a growing tendency in the past century, with the rise of nation-states and especially of new nation states, to establish a national identity determined by the majority. The result is a tendency for pressure towards the minorities to become more like the majority rather than to celebrate the national cultural, linguistic and religious diversity. Part of this is also due to the fear of conflict among groups, which we have seen happen in South Asia and which we witness today in the tribal conflicts taking place in Africa.

Unfortunately, the converse is also true. Where Muslims are a majority, they too have been exerting pressure upon the minority groups, be they Muslims like the Shia in Pakistan or non-Muslims in the Arab countries, to 'be less different'. The tragedy is that this was never a part of classical Islamic history from the beginning of time.

We seem to have forgotten the legacy of the second Caliph Umar b. al-Khattab, who not only protected the Christians in Jerusalem and refrained from praying in the Church of the Nativity when invited by the Patriarch as he did not want future Muslims to claim it because he had prayed in it, but also was responsible for inviting seventy Jewish families to take up residence in Jerusalem after having been banished by the Romans in 70 CE. It was right then with Umar that the Muslims established the principle of freedom of religious expression and established a multi-cultural, multi-religious society that allowed not only freedom of religious expression within the community but also created the space – that is to say the legal framework – for each religious community to have its laws practised within that community.

*Do you condemn the so-called 'silent majority' of Muslims all over the world? What would you have them do to be significant in some way? Are they endangered if they speak or exhort reform?*

Most people – Muslim or non-Muslim – are busy with their lives: working hard to make ends meet, to raise families, educate their children, and to take care of older parents... I condemn no one because I know what it is like.

But in every society there are activists, those who have decided to take on the issues that they believe are of concern to the larger community. There are also people who are empowered to do more for the sake of their community and for the better well-being of the world. But even they are besieged by many requests and are often uncertain about what mechanisms will truly work.

*A young Hindu divorcee friend of mine keeps asking me why my religion is not explicated in its real and humane glory which she experiences as a single woman fending for herself in Dubai, especially since the Sheikhs have the wherewithal and the power over the media to do so. She is, quite simply, puzzled about this.*

I am delighted to hear about your friend who has truly experienced our many core Islamic values of *zakat*, which is really about social responsibility as also the caring and protective attitude towards women. And we hope we can get more help out of the Sheikhs as she mentions.



Much of my work through the Cordoba Initiative and ASMA Society aims to promote equality and the proper treatment of women specifically in Islamic societies around the world. Our Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equity seeks to develop and magnify precisely the kind of compassionate Islamic society praised by your Hindu friend.

In establishing the WISE project, I discovered a need for religiously grounded arguments in women's advocacy efforts to help combat the false religious justifications for abuse of women given even today by some who remain unaware of our faith's tradition of equality. You are right in pinpointing what has become a sad reality of our times, that these voices of ignorance can be heard louder and more clearly than those advocating a return to our classical Islamic social values. By fostering collaboration among fragmented groups of women, however, we can redefine human rights in an Islamic legal framework and thus continue to improve the way we treat our fellow humans in all sectors.

*I wonder if you have seen a French film called Monsieur Ibrahim by Depardieu with Omar Sharif playing an Arab in Paris? And read Abdaf Soueif's book Map of Love about Egypt? Are these the sort of deflected, almost unintended initiatives that work harder because they are not head-on and preachy?*

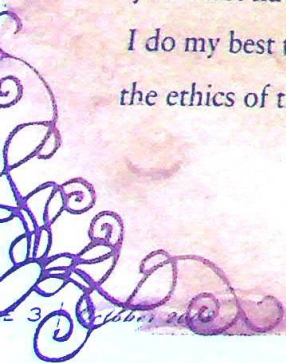
I have seen the film but not read the book you mention. I believe what makes them work is that they are stories, not direct preaching of the principle. This has been the method of Sufi teaching: interesting stories that have a moral in them. They work because the audience sees the moral directly and individually apply it to their own lives. By being proactive about it, that is, by taking responsibility for their own destiny, they thereby forge it.

*Isn't the training of young clerics and priests critical – so that they can influence the young and the old in the community to feel and earn self-respect in this life and in today's environment? Do you personally teach and train young preachers?*

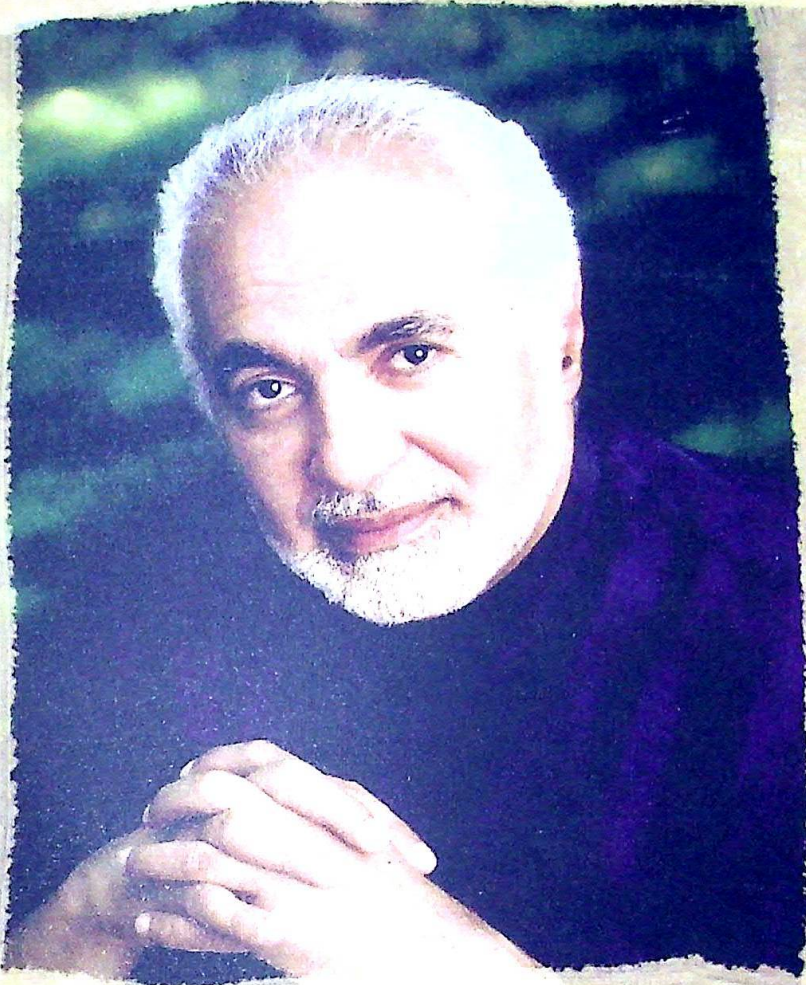
Your point is excellent. The training of young leaders who can spread and leverage the message of tolerance, pluralism and positive values throughout their constituencies is paramount to the work that I do all over the world. Which is why we have established a Cordoba Initiative programme, the Muslim Leaders of Tomorrow initiative, which brings together young leaders in diverse fields from all over the world to network with each other and build alliances that allow them to innovate for positive change in their communities. By mobilising these leaders, they will act as intermediaries in our efforts to reach Muslims everywhere – reach out to the grassroots in every country.

We have actually done this recently in Holland, where several of these 'MLTs' were involved, as Dutch Muslims, in working with the Dutch government, civil society and fellow Dutch Muslims to avert a potential crisis from Member of Parliament, Geert Wilders who was to have released a provocative film accusing the Quran of being the cause of extremism in the Muslim World.

The key point is that to be effective, you must know your local community, you must be involved with them and you must have their respect. I no longer reside in any one place long enough to apprentice a young *imam*, but I do my best to help young men become *khateeb*s. It is through preaching that the message of Islam is spread, and the ethics of the faith are universal.







*Who among the Kashmiri Sufis do you consider worth reviving actively today in order to purvey sanity through art, culture and music? What about them should be highlighted and built on?*

The story of how Islam came to Kashmir through the great Sufis needs to be told, especially the biographies of the famous Sufis of Kashmir such as Sayyid Bulbul Shah, Sayyid Ali Hamdani and Mir Mohammad Hamdani. The point is, when you stand at the *maqam* of the *din ul-fitrah*, you begin to see the essential presence of God and how God reveals His truths to all cultures. You become enabled to speak to people in their own language, as our Prophet Muhammad instructed us to do.

This is why the Hindus regarded the Sufis, who were able to express the truths of Islam in Hindu vocabulary, as 'Muslim Rishis'. A fine example of this was the Sufi master Sheikh Nuruddin Nurani who was deeply loved and venerated by both Hindus and Muslims to the point that they called him Nand Rishi – and Sahazanand by the Kashmiri Pundits – or the one who has found Truth within himself and, thus, the blissful one.

There are many things to highlight about them: their love of God, their ability to help transform people towards a higher God-consciousness, their social struggle for the equality of humankind, their kindness towards the poor. These are eternal ethical standards that we would do well to emulate and that are an integral part of the Islamic ethos.

But, perhaps, the most relevant aspect to today's challenge is how six and seven centuries ago the Kashmiri sages of different religions invited people to the love of God and bonded the Hindus and Muslims. Tragically, since the mid-twentieth century, we have seen the Indian subcontinent riven with the Hindu-Muslim conflict, resulting in the division into India and Pakistan accompanied by enormous bloodshed.

Kashmir remains the source of conflict between India and Pakistan. It is much loved by both, perhaps because of this history we have just referred to. I believe that Kashmir, therefore, has the key to the solution of the Hindu-Muslim conflict. If or when the Kashmiris shift their attitude from being a victim of the conflict to being a mediator of the conflict, perhaps a major political shift can occur. I personally believe that the source of this shift can only be through the deepest beliefs people have, and those are their spiritual and religious anchors.

And this is another reason why the Kashmiri spiritual ethos of deep tolerance and respect for all religions is important today: it can help solve a major global political conflict that has eluded the people of South Asia for six decades.



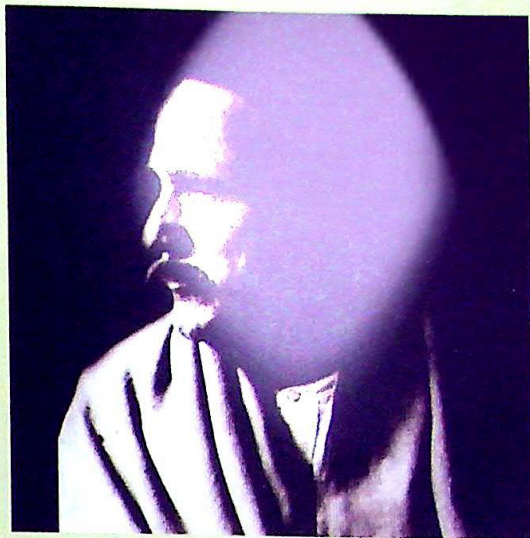
*By Syeda Bilgrami Imam – author, communications expert and award-winning professional in advertising. She is also Founding Member and Consulting Editor with Rumi Foundation.*



A close-up photograph of two tulip buds on a single stem. The buds are a pale, creamy yellow color and are positioned diagonally. The background is dark and heavily textured, resembling soil or a rough surface. The lighting is soft, highlighting the smooth texture of the buds.

ریتم و ایلول





IT WAS WHILE HE WAS STUDYING IN ENGLAND AND GERMANY THAT IQBAL DEVELOPED A TASTE FOR READING AND writing in Persian, and he thought that he could express his philosophical concepts better and reach his wider audiences through that language. It is the Persian language itself that helped him reach Moulana Rumi's *Mathnavi*. By that time he had studied Western philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Henry Bergson and Goethe, and he soon became a strong critic of Western society which had got obsessed with materialistic pursuits.

The poetry and philosophical discourses of Moulana Rumi exercised the deepest influence on Iqbal's mind and he started concentrating intensely on the state of Islam and the culture and history of Islamic civilisation. He accepted Rumi as his guide and philosopher and started reminding his readers of the past glories of Islamic civilisation. He aimed at focussing on Islam as a source of socio-political emancipation.

Iqbal's masterpieces in poetry comprised verses in Persian and his 'Asrar-e-Khudi' (Secrets of the Self) and 'Rumuz-e-Bekhudi' (Hints of Selflessness) are not only testimony to the fact that he had mastery over the Persian language, but also that he had succeeded in conveying his philosophy of life through the Persian verse and Rumi's influence was writ large on the horizons of his mind. In his first philosophical poem 'Asrar-e-Khudi' he declared Rumi as his *pir* (guide) and himself as *mureed* (disciple) and explained that the aim of life is the attainment of self-knowledge and self-realisation. Later, in 'Rumuz-e-Bekhudi' he (Iqbal) tried to prove that the Islamic way of life was the best code of conduct for a nation's viability. He explained that a person must keep his individual characteristics intact but once this is achieved, he should sacrifice his personal ambitions for the needs of the nation. He also conveyed that man could not realise the 'Self' away from society. Iqbal saw the individual and community as reflections of each other. Further, the individual needs have to be strengthened before the individual can be integrated into the community, whose development in turn depends on the preservation of the communal ego. In his 'Payam-e-Mashriq' (The Message of the East) he responded to the philosophy of German poet Goethe who had bemoaned that the West had become too materialistic in outlook. Explaining Goethe, he (Iqbal)



کشی که باینگ گرفت  
بیت می تراشد رنگ مزار

ضمیرش تهر از خیال بلند  
خودی ناشناس ز خود سرسار

برشم قبا خواجہ از محبت او  
نصیب تشر جامع تارک

نه در دید او فرغ چای  
نه در سینه او دل بقرار

از این نشانی قلم و کبر  
سر جاکش آفریند شکر

asserted that it was the East that would provide a message of hope and rejuvenate spiritual values. Iqbal wanted to remind the West of the importance of morality, religion and civilisation by underlining the need for cultivating human feelings. He explained that the individual could never aspire for higher dimensions unless he understood the nature of spirituality.

The *Mathnavi* of Moulana Jalaluddin Rumi is one of the most highly acclaimed poetical works of the past ages, by saints and sages, and fortunately for the present day contemporary world, there is no dearth of people who can interpret the *Mathnavi*.

Khawaja Irfani writes in his book *The Sayings of Rumi and Iqbal*, "The first great compiler and interpreter of the immortal Persian literature, Prof. E. G. Browne, considered Rumi the most eminent Sufi poet and the *Mathnavi* as a great poem of all times. But what is thought-provoking and heart-warming for us is the lifelong devotion of the most eminent scholars like R. A. Nicholson and A. J. Arberry who dedicated their creative efforts to the translations, interpretations, appreciation and propagation of the Message and Muse of the immortal Reed Player of Konia for the English knowing world."

The saintly scholar, R. A. Nicholson, regarded the *Mathnavi* as a 'Unique panorama of universal existence, unrolling itself through Time and Eternity' and, according to Arberry, "Rumi was the man who enriched humanity with his splendid and massive contribution to literature and thought, whose greatness is as much acknowledged in the West as in the East."

Iqbal had a deep study of Western philosophers – Kant, Bergson, Nietzsche, Shopenhaver and others. He made a conscious effort to synthesise the ideas of Western philosophers with Islam but, ultimately, he found that it was a situation of attempting reconciliation. It seems he was closer to Bergson who stressed that the material



world is life, change and movement. Finally, what brought solace to his heart and mind was Rumi and his *Mathnavi*.

Dr Irfani has rightly emphasised that the *Mathnavi* has been regarded by Muslim scholars, saints and sages, through the past ages, as the most acceptable interpretation of the teachings of Islam and the last of the greatest classical and mystic poets, Maulana Jami (AD 1414–1492) had remarked that the *Mathnavi* of the spiritual leader Rumi is the Quran in the Pahlavi (Persian) language.

An opinion held very widely in the East is that it was Iqbal who understood Rumi as a person and his thoughts and introduced him to the West, but European scholars do recognise that, among others, it was Reynold Nicholson who invested time and energy to interpret Rumi very accurately. Nicholson wrote extensively on the life of Rumi and also interpreted his mysticism in the most appropriate sense of the term. It was again Nicholson who explained Rumi's devotion to Shams-i-Tabriz and the dispute created by the disciples of Rumi regarding the Master's devotion to

Shams, their jealousy of Shams-i-Tabriz who had to leave Konia for Damascus twice and how he never returned after he fled for the second time. It was Nicholson who gave the details of how Sultan Walad (Rumi's son) described the passionate and uncontrollable emotion which overwhelmed his father at that time and he (Nicholson) quoted Sultan Walad –

*Never for a moment did he cease from listening to music (sama') and dancing;*

*Never did he rest by day or night.*

*He had been a mufti: he became a poet*

*He had been an ascetic: he became intoxicated by Love.*

*'Twas not the wine of the grape: the illumined soul*

*Drinks only the wine of Light.*

Again, Nicholson described Sufi pantheism or monism involving the following propositions:

- "There is One Real Being, the Ultimate Ground of all existence. This Reality may be viewed either as God (the Divine Essence) or as the World (phenomena by which the hidden Essence is made manifest)."
- "There is no creation in Time. Divine Self-manifestation is a perpetual process. While the forms of the universe change and pass and are simultaneously renewed without a moment's intermission, in its essence it is co-eternal with God. There never was a time when it did not exist as a whole in His Knowledge."
- "God is both Immanent, in the sense that He appears under the aspect of limitation in all phenomenal forms, and Transcendent, in the sense that He is the Absolute Reality above and beyond every appearance."
- "The Divine Essence is unknowable. God makes His Nature known to us by Names and Attributes which He has revealed in the Quran."



- “According to the Holy Tradition, ‘I created the creatures in order that I might be known’ – the entire content of God’s Knowledge is objectified in the universe and pre-eminently in Man. The Divine Mind, which rules and animates the cosmos as an Indwelling Rational Principle (Logos), displays itself completely in the Perfect Man.”

The crux of the inspiration from Rumi over Iqbal is reflected in the poem ‘Pir-o-Mureed’ (The Master and the Disciple) wherein Iqbal raises questions which the master answers. It is during this long conversation that Rumi tells Iqbal the secret of how to be righteous and on the path of love:

“If you search knowledge for being strong in body, it is going to be a snake that will bite you;  
And if it is knowledge that enlightens your mind and fills your heart with the divine ecstasy, it is going to be your eternal friend.”

Rumi and Iqbal’s times were different. More than six centuries separated them. But, Iqbal considered himself to be eternally close to Rumi, so much so that in his quest for ‘Insan-e-Kamil’ (the perfect man), he (Iqbal) derived inspiration only from Rumi’s philosophy of love and compassion.

A word about Iqbal’s connection with Kashmir is aptly needed. He marvelled on the fact of his being a Kashmiri – particularly a member of the Brahmin dynasty called Sapru. He even saw his nose in the mirror as a mark of identification. But he felt sad on occasions and lamented their (Kashmiris) deprivation and impoverishment, and exhorted them to struggle for their emancipation. In the ‘Saqinama’ of his ‘Payam-e-Mashriq’ he even foresaw their urge to rise for rights. Some of the verses of the ‘Saqinama’ are full of appeal and compassion:

*The Khwaja (the mill owner) wears the Qaba (long coat) of  
costly silk and the weaver has nothing but tattered clothes;  
Ah! There is no glow in their (Kashmiris) eyes,  
nor any ambition that keeps their bosoms warm;  
Oh, God! Pour a drop of that wine (Divine) on them  
that fires their imagination and they rise!*

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By Prof. Saifuddin Soz, educationist, economist, writer, political and social activist, who has written many essays and short stories in Kashmiri. Of the books published by him, his translation of M. Allin’s book 1,00,000 Whys from Russian to Kashmiri was awarded Soviet Land Nehru Award. He has written several articles in leading newspapers and journals on various subjects – Islam, modernism, rights of women, secularism, literature, education and economics.

He has held various positions in the government including being a member of the Lok Sabha and Union Cabinet Minister, Environment and Forests. He has represented India at international fora as member/leader of Indian delegations. Currently, Prof. Soz who is also member of the Rajya Sabha, is Union Cabinet Minister for Water Resources.



إِنَّا لِلّٰهِ  
وَأِنَّا إِلَيْهِ  
رَاٰجِعُونَ

INALAHA JAMIL UN WA HUBBUL JAMAAL  
VERILY GOD IS BEAUTIFUL  
AND LOVES BEAUTY





# the fragrance of Kashmir



KASHMIR IS BEAUTIFUL, VARIED AND VULNERABLE. TO EACH ONE OF HIS CREATIONS IT HAS ITS OWN WONDER AND ASSOCIATIONS.

Beauty and vulnerability walk hand in hand. While beauty is the most endearing attribute of the Creator, it comes coupled with helplessness. In simple terms, the more beautiful a society and its milieu, the more defenseless and vulnerable it is. If it is true that Jesus came to Kashmir, it is here that he must have reiterated his golden dictum that the meek shall inherit the earth.

Kashmir is nothing but these divine tender feelings, seeking out humility in man. Like true beauty it does not want to be possessed, but only beheld as an eternal tribute to His glory. This is the Fragrance of Kashmir and that is why it is known as a Garden of Saints. It dwells in the heart protected from all external threats.

Industrialisation, development and economic growth have created a false sense of conquest and achievement. These have given man a mirage, an illusion of well-being and superiority, with which he feels he can trade in the buying, selling and marketing of beauty. It is only when we can cleanse ourselves of this feeling that we can look at milieus like Kashmir, unspoiled by modern man. Societies which lead a humble existence, in fear of the Creator, and with love of His creations, invariably create beauty around themselves. Beauty pours out of such human efforts and fills the space with warmth and reassurance of His Magnificence and Benevolence. When inequality and barbarism come in, this beauty is lost again.

The beauty of living in a simple adobe house is a true celebration of light, sound and seasons. The experience is way above living in brick and cement. But does the world around you respect you for this and protect you in this vulnerable environment? In many parts of the countryside you still have adobe structures on which sunlight plays soft music. But our advanced society has lost its respect and confidence for such humble spaces and, therefore, destroyed the first gate to beauty. People feel scared to live in adobe homes with surfaces covered with reed mats. Refinement and understanding are part of every culture. But they are only possible when entirely egalitarian and free from any device or design to subjugate or exploit man or nature.

Beauty is meaningless without love of the highest order. Saiyid Ali writes that gnosis – *Marifa* – leads to the love of God. Saiyid Ali Hamdani was a mystic from Hamadan who is said to have visited Kashmir three times. When he visited the Valley for the third time in AD 1383, Nuruddin Rishi, the patron saint of the Valley, was four years old. Saiyid Ali ascribes love to five reasons. *Mahabbat e nafs* (the love of the self), *Mahabbat e Mohsin* (love of a benefactor), *Mahabbat e sahib e kamaal* (love for the perfect man), *Mahabbat e jamal* (love for the beautiful) and *Mahabbat e taruf e ruhani* (love for a spiritual relationship). He divided the lovers of God into four categories. From the most common to the highest among the elect. And when one attains this stage, Saiyid Ali says his love undergoes no change, because the lover at this point is drowned in the sea of unity and achieves annihilation in God.



Saiyid Ali asserts that God created man in order to manifest His great mystery. He endowed man with reason and faith so that he could select for himself an ideal path. But, he points out, an overwhelming majority of men did not accept the guidance of their reason or faith and adopted paths which made them cruel, obstinate, stubborn and negligent.

Sheikh Nuruddin Rishi writes:

*The lover is he who burns with love,  
Whose self shines like gold.  
When man's heart lights up with the flame of love,  
Then shall he reach la makaan (the placeless).*

Sheikh Nuruddin developed his thought in his own atmosphere, inspired by the Sufi thoughts of Saiyid Ali Hamdani and Lalleshwari, the Shaivite mystic, who had set the train of the Bhakti movement.

Nuruddin and Lalla resound of each other, reflecting the universal truth and the essence of a common ethos.

*When we belong to the same parents,  
Then why this difference?  
Let Hindus and Muslims (together)  
Worship God alone  
We came to this earth as partners.  
We should have shared our joys and  
sorrows together.*





While Saiyid Ali Hamdani gave a way to feel and see, he brought with him 700 craftspeople. Slowly, craft became a way of life to express their needs both worldly and otherworldly. Craft became a reflection of their spiritualism and spiritualism became a reflection of their craft which, till today, has lasted mindless market forces.

During the making of my fifteenth century epic, *Zooni*, on the life of its peasant poetess queen Habba Khatoon, Kashmir revealed itself to me through both craft and music. Music in its traditional as well as spiritual sense. Something in the Valley had made it severe, and people realised that those who visited the Valley came for something external, something to which they were indifferent. For these visitors, mountains were just mountains, only better or worse than other mountains. They could not hear the echo they contained for centuries. After the exile of the last Chak ruler of Kashmir, Sultan Yusuf Shah Chak – the lover and husband of Habba Khatoon, the music of Kashmir developed a predominant wail, a sigh of separation, which was either reflected in a feeling of intense love or presented a plaintive, woeful and melancholic mood... of helplessness and resignation. Still, like nature, it has its bursts of optimism and the rhythm flies into gaiety and abandon. *Chhakkri* is the most popular form of Kashmiri folk which invariably expresses the songs of the unlettered woman of the Valley. The woman, like in Hindi poetry, becomes the lover.

Kashmiri music flowered in the reign of its most evolved and artistic ruler, Sultan Zainul Abideen, who ruled between 1420 and 1470. It became a blend of Indian classical music and the music of Persia, Arabia and Central Asia. Soon after him in 1472, Sultan Hasan Shah had 1022 musicians in his court including six Carnatic musicians to popularise *ragas* in Kashmir.

*Sufiana Kalaam*, the music of the mystics, was more meditative and remained in the realm of the *Khanaqahs* of the Sufis. It was an unusual blend of Indian *ragas* and Persian *maqams* which flowed one into the other seamlessly with the passage of time as they were sung.

The *ghazals* rendered in this music were the Persian verses of Hazrat Amir Khusrau, Hafez, Sadi and Hazrat Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi, and the Kashmiri sonnets and poems of Shaikhul Alam Nuruddin Rishi and other Kashmiri mystic poets. The instruments of both these forms of singing vary. While *Chhakkri* has the rhythm of a *tumbaknari* (an earthen drum), a *nott*, an earthen pot, a *sarangi* and a *rabab*, *Sufiana Kalaam* has a *tabla* and *saz e Kashmir*, a derivative of the Persian *qamanche*, and a *santoor*.





Craft was less sensitive and vulnerable, to reflect immediately the inner psyche of society. There was a vacuum after the evidence of how people dressed in the eighth century through sculptures and terracotta statues and figurines till the Moghul period. Jewellery was more evident. While craft flourished with the coming of Saiyid Ali Hamdani, little evidence of the clothing is found. In fact, when I was making my film *Zooni*, we had difficulty determining the style of court clothing in the mid-sixteenth century. Mary Mcfadden, my costume designer, took the help of art historian Stuart Cary Welch to arrive at a likely style which was a derivative from the Safavid period of Iran. It was before the Moghuls had entered the Valley and any influence from them was most unlikely.



*Naqsh* is the basis of craft. It is the motif which manifests itself in various forms, in various mediums. It was an abundance of this that Kashmir witnessed. It was the Islamic principle of Unity that found expression in these diverse expressions of craft. *God has inscribed beauty on all things... Hadith*. From music to space, to architecture, to weaving, to embroidery, to *papier mache*, deep spiritual connections are visibly evident. Calligraphy and geometry of space are the guiding principles of its aesthetics. As Hazrat Ali says, "The beauty of writing is the tongue of the hand and the eloquence of thought." The journey of the Kashmiri is long-winded and intriguing. From very early beginnings in the third century BC to its present day, we move through many innovations and additions brought in by Saiyid Ali Hamdani in 1242 to Sultan Zainul Abideen who ruled the Valley from 1420 to 1470. During Amir Timur's invasion of India in 1398, Sultan Sikandar had sent his son Zainul Abideen, later to be known as the Akbar of Kashmir, with gifts and offerings, but distrusting the promise of allegiance, he took him back to Samarqand as a hostage, where he was allowed freedom of movement while being virtually a prisoner. Samarqand was being created by Timur as a great centre of learning, arts and crafts. From each city he had conquered, including India, he brought the finest craftspeople to Damascus. Zainul Abideen, therefore, saw the burgeoning of the best of the craft transplanted from different parts of Asia.

In 1405, when Timur died, Zainul Abideen stayed on to persuade the best craftsmen to go with him to Kashmir, where they were settled with liberal salaries and grants of land.

During the reign of Sultan Zainul Abideen, for 50 years, craft evolved in the finest milieu with the finest scope of evolution. The process of attracting craftsmen from Persia and Arabia continued till Kashmir truly became a haven for manmade beauty. The spiritual ambience too was at its peak with the presence of Shaikhulalam Nuruddin Rishi. And thus craft found in Kashmir its true mystical origins, the inner beauty as expressed by Hazrat Ali, who headed every craft guild with the advent of Islam. The encyclopedia of the crafts of Kashmir is exhaustive, ranging from wool to wood, metal to *papier mache*... from painting in *kari kalamdani* style on carved doors, windows, pen cases, furniture and *khatamband* ceilings, to weaving different grades of wool to create the world's finest specimens of shawls and carpets. Embroideries too, varying from apparel to felt for floor covers. The Moghul period and subsequent rules, including the colonial era, opened up the vast feudal subcontinent as a market for Kashmiri craftsmanship. In recent times, while export has changed the essential character of many craft forms, modern usage in India and mindless marketing have, indeed, downgraded the craft which needs to be put back to its original glory and branding.





*The distant meadows are in bloom  
Hast thou not heard my plaint?  
Flowers bloom on mountain lakes  
Come, let us to mountain mead;  
The lilac blooms in the distant woods,  
Has thou not heard my plaint?*

— Habba Khatoon

Architecture is a symphony of several art forms and inspirational elements such as sound and light, space and the human spirit. In Kashmir, where all the elements were heightened and evolved and placed in the glorious lap of nature changing dramatically with the four seasons, it became a truly unique and spiritual experience. From the earlier temple structures of the Hindu and Buddhist periods, an amalgam of Doric and Roman styles, to medieval mosques, shrines, palaces, bridges and gardens, Kashmir exhibits a vast vocabulary of architectural styles. Though much of the buildings has been burnt in fires, a few spectacular specimens still survive. The pre-Moghul period monuments are significantly different from the Moghul ones. The mosque of Shah Hamadan, Jami Masjid and the Madani Mosque are excellent surviving examples. Some very special details point to the architectural features of the periods. Tiles with man-leopard and dragon motifs on spandrels of arches, arabesque engravings on doorways, richly carved wooden plinths, footstones of columns, cornices and roofs with soil filled to grow grass, and stepped roofs, steeples, long majestic wooden pillars, are evident in the Jami Masjid and the Shah Hamadan Mosques. The *jaali* screens which adorn the exteriors, particularly the extending balconies called *zoondabs* or moon observatories, as the name implies, were made of small pieces of wood assembled to create geometric shapes. It was later that stonework was introduced when Akbar sent 200 masons to build Hari Parbat Fort.

Kashmir is a place where the good, bad and ugly are instantly evident. Kashmir is where souls live forever. Where fragrance doesn't fade away. Where voices echo eternal truths, where the *bulbul* is a confidante of the pain of separation.

Kashmir requires a very special and sensitive approach to celebrate its culture and values, to empower it and present it to the world with pride and dignity. To make its people feel proud of its fragrance.

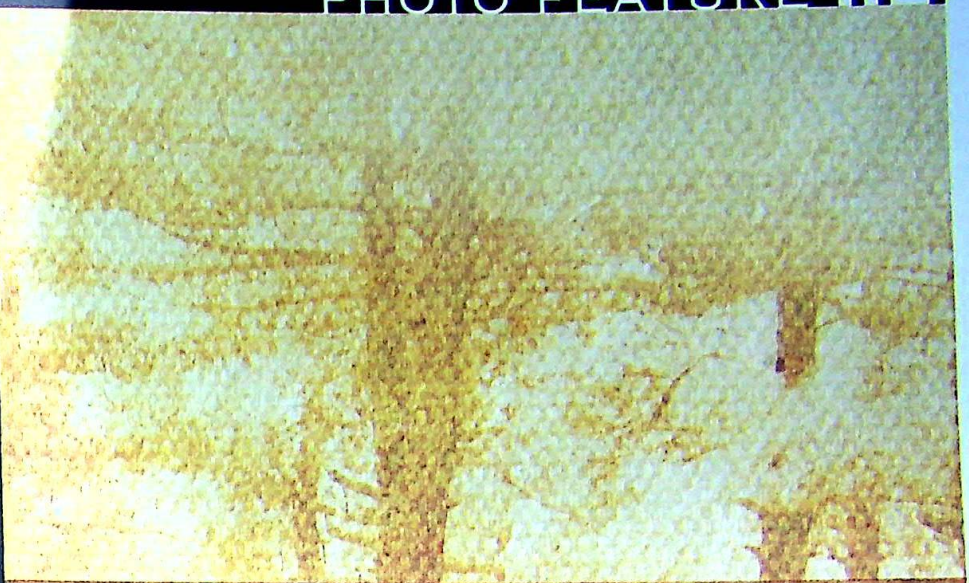


By Muzaffar Ali – Film-maker, painter, and Executive Director & Secretary of Rumi Foundation. First published by Hi!Blitz, Volume 4, Issue 9.











# Ashq

*(Passion or Intense, Ecstatic Love)*



Ashq is the final step  
leading to God and a lover  
who has reached it  
almost has no further  
steps to take

'ASHQ' MEANS INTENSE LOVE OF AND FONDNESS FOR PERFECTION, beauty, or physical charm. Sufis usually call this sort of love, for example, love for the opposite sex, figurative or metaphorical love. Real love, the love of the Eternal Monarch, is felt for His Grace and Beauty manifested within His Majesty, and for His Majesty manifested within His Grace and Beauty. The real, intense love felt for God is a wing of light granted to us by Him so that people can use it to reach Him. Feeling such love can also be viewed as the spirit being like a moth drawn toward the Light, the essence of existence. This intense love is the most basic and mysterious cause of the universe's creation. God has created the universe in order to be known and loved, and so that those souls awakened to truth will feel and manifest a deep interest in His Essence, the Attributes, and Names.

'Ashq', which the spirit feels without the intervention of free will, cannot be controlled by the person so affected, for its real source is God, Who loves Himself in a way special to His Sacred Essence and is essentially independent of the created. In addition, it is essentially different from the love felt by the created for the created or the Creator. This sacred, essential love of God for Himself, including His Attributes and Names, is the reason why He created the universe and why He caused humanity to appear in the world. It is also this love that manifests itself in human beings as love for God, as the most essential centre of humanity's relationship with God.

'Ashq' is the final step leading to God, and a lover who has reached it almost has no further steps to take. God manifested Himself first as this sacred, essential love required by His being God. I particularly avoid attributing to Him *ashq* (passion or ecstatic love) in the absolute sense of the word, and prefer using the word *mahabba* (love).

Some tend to call this Divine Love Knowledge, as Knowledge is the first manifestation of the Absolute Divine Being, Who is infinitely exalted above having any equals or likes. Every manifestation of the Divine Being is considered as



This first condescension is called 'Knowledge', as it is God's manifestation of His Knowledge. It is also called 'the Sacred Love' in the sense that God loves to observe and to be 'observed'; or 'the Tablet' as it comprehends or contains all of existence; or 'the Pen', as it handles all things in existence in all their details. *Jabarut* (the highest, immaterial empyrean) and the Truth of Ahmad (the Prophet's Name mentioned in the original copy of the Gospels and in the Heavens) are other titles of this condescension, or the first manifestation of the Divine Being.

Sacred Love is a mystery peculiar to the Divine Essence. Other Attributes of His are appended to or dependent on this love. It is for this reason that those who fly with the wings of *'ashq* directly reach the Divine Essence and attain amazement, whereas others have to pass through the intermediate realms of the worlds of things and Names.

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The ways leading to God are almost beyond number. Sufism, the science of truth, contains the food, light, and other necessities travellers need for the journey, and the (spiritual) orders (*tariqas*) are the ports from which they set out, or the schools in which the principles of the journey are taught.

The ways to the Truth can be divided into two main groups. The first is the way in which the wayfarer is offered or taught such principles as eating less, drinking less, sleeping less, increasing contemplation, and refraining from unnecessary social intercourse. Almost all Sufi orders are based on these practices. The main invocations recited by followers of this way are the Seven Names: There is no god but God, God, He, the Truth, the All-Living, the Self-Subsistent, the All-Overwhelming. By reciting these Names, one seeks to pass through the seven steps of the human self or soul: the Evil-Commanding, the Self-Condemning, the Inspired, the Serene and Peaceful or the Soul at Rest, the Content (with however God treats it), the (Soul) Pleasing (to God), and the Purified or Innocent Self or Soul. To these seven Names, some add such Names of Majesty as the All-Powerful, the All-Strong, the All-Compelling, the Master, and the All-Loving; others add such Names of Grace as the Unique, the One, the Peerlessly All-Single, and the Eternally Besought-of-All.

The second way is based on strict adherence to the Qur'an and the Sunna, and the encouragement of certain recitations. Those who follow this way strive to comply with the Sunna in whatever they do. Rather than reciting certain Names, they follow the methods used by God's Messenger to worship, invoke, and pray, reflect on His acts and creatures, and mention Him with all of His Names. Joining these activities with a meticulous following of the commandments of Shari'a, they are firmly attached to their guides or teachers and abandon themselves to the tides of *'ashq* and spiritual attraction toward God.

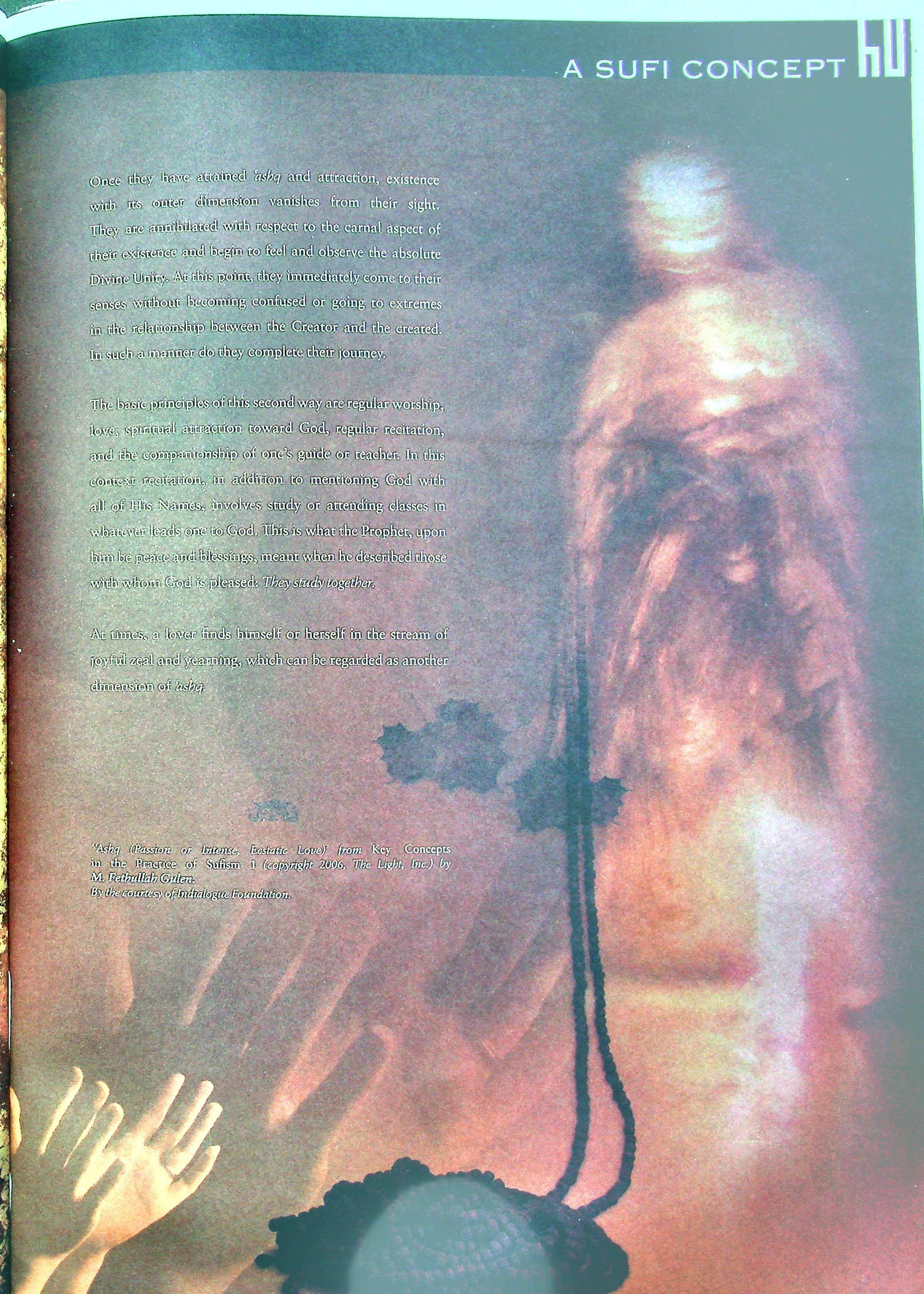


Once they have attained *ishq* and attraction, existence with its outer dimension vanishes from their sight. They are annihilated with respect to the carnal aspect of their existence and begin to feel and observe the absolute Divine Unity. At this point, they immediately come to their senses without becoming confused or going to extremes in the relationship between the Creator and the created. In such a manner do they complete their journey.

The basic principles of this second way are regular worship, love, spiritual attraction toward God, regular recitation, and the companionship of one's guide or teacher. In this context recitation, in addition to mentioning God with all of His Names, involves study or attending classes in whatever leads one to God. This is what the Prophet, upon him be peace and blessings, meant when he described those with whom God is pleased: *They study together.*

At times, a lover finds himself or herself in the stream of joyful zeal and yearning, which can be regarded as another dimension of *ishq*.

*"Ashq (Passion or Intense, Ecstatic Love)" from Key Concepts in the Practice of Sufism 1 (copyright 2006, The Light, Inc.) by M. Fethullah Gulen.*  
By the courtesy of Indialogue Foundation.





A scenic landscape painting of a tulip field in Kashmir. The foreground is filled with rows of tulips in various colors, including pink, red, and yellow, stretching towards the horizon. In the background, there are bare trees and mountains under a hazy sky. The text "What Kashmir means to me" is written in a cursive script across the middle of the image.

*What Kashmir means to me*



## FLAME ORANGE, CHINAR... & MEMORIES

When I first moved to Kashmir as a young teenage bride, the magnificence of the Valley completely captured my imagination. I had been raised in Mumbai and Bangalore and the sheer beauty of what was to become my new home overwhelmed me.

I was charmed by the simplicity of the people of Kashmir who accepted me as their own. I realised that they were not only gifted with an inherent talent and innate sense of colour and design as displayed in their handicrafts, but also belonged to an old tradition of Sufism. The *chinar* leaves and the stillness of the lakes have inspired many Sufi poets to a high spiritual level, proclaiming universal love and harmony in their poetry.

In the atmosphere lies a slice of deeply felt humanity, a moment of spiritual revelation, articulating a love for mankind and the Almighty.

My memories are linked with all the seasons. I still feel an excitement when I see the delicate pink and white blossoms of cherry and the almond and apple orchards heralding spring, followed by the vibrant hues of the summer flora. The flame orange leaves of autumn evoke a feeling of nostalgia and happy memories in contrast to the stark white winter which has its own special appeal.



When friends from outside Kashmir visit my home, I show them the picturesque surroundings of the Valley with great pride. Besides the exotic Mughal gardens it is the extraordinary waterfall in the middle of nowhere that makes one feel God took his time creating this paradise... with a subtlety that reveals the power of nature over time... to unfold a tranquil world.

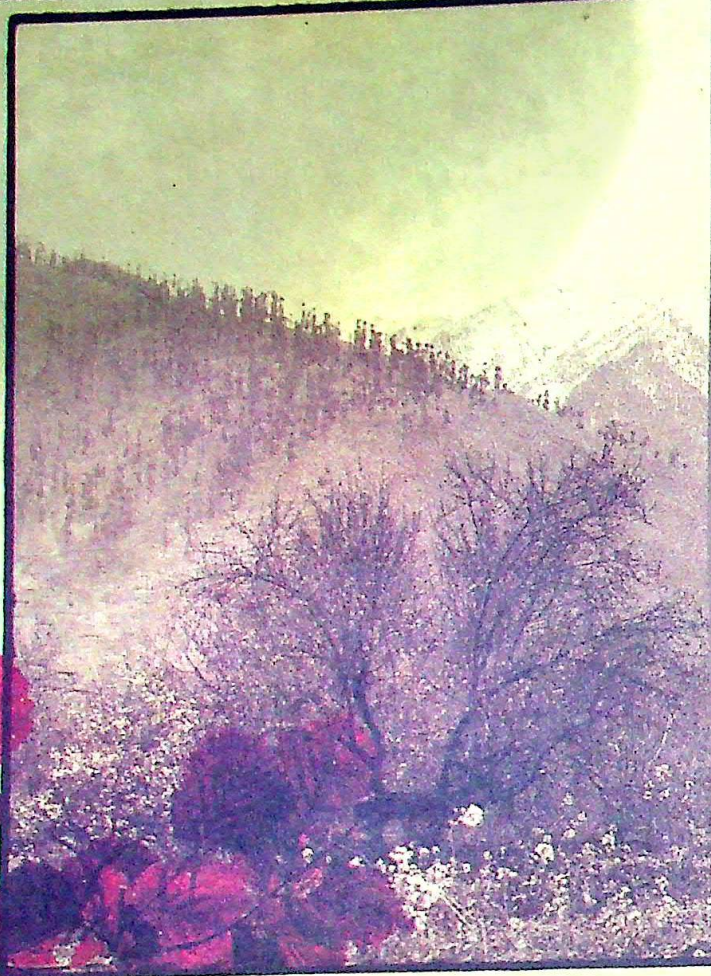
Even today, when I enter Kashmir, I am greeted by a particular fragrance in the air which transports me to another planet that can be found nowhere else in the world.



*Dilshad Sheikh's grit and determination helped her fight against all odds and re-establish her connection with the Valley for the right and dignity of her children. This lover of Kashmir not only believes in constantly searching for true happiness, (coincidentally, Dilshad means 'happiness') but also believes in looking at life positively and spreading cheer. Involved with taking her husband's business forward, Dilshad expresses her creativity through designs that touch her everyday life - be they in clothes, interiors, gardens. She is a Runit Foundation member.*



## PARADISE LOST



The notion of an earthly Paradise is common to many parts of the world and in the subcontinent this has traditionally been Kashmir: 'Paradise on Earth'. The idea of paradise is itself archetypal, speaking as it does of a haven/heaven wherein humans may find perfect peace, harmony and beauty. It is a symbol of the end of 'the quest', the goal of life, and is a universal motif expressing a universal human yearning. The modern *Shangri-La* is a contemporary expression of this archetypal idea.

It is perhaps no coincidence, then, that along with Kashmir's legendary beauty it is also renowned for its numerous saints and sages, Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist. While the first Muslim rulers of Kashmir did not emerge until the middle of the thirteenth century, Muslim settlements were known to have existed as early as the eighth century. Over the following centuries, for reasons ranging from invasions and war, to the seeking of a spiritual sanctuary of great beauty, or a refuge from the Mongols, Kashmir became a destination for numerous Muslim mystics, especially from Persia and Central Asia. By the end of the sixteenth century and the height of Mughal rule in India, Kashmir had become a major spiritual centre.

By then Sufism in Kashmir had developed along two broad lines, the orthodox Muslim *silsilas* and the more indigenous Rishis. A. R. Rafiqi's history of Sufism in Kashmir suggests how the Rishis, inspired by Nuruddin, drew on 'almost wholly popular' sources in the course of preaching 'love of mankind' and 'values associated with... liberal and generous attitudes'. For these they did not look so much to Sufism as to the 'ideas and practices of the Hindu ascetics, especially those of the Saivites of Kashmir'.

From an archetypal perspective, the Indian subcontinent can be called a 'fateful' place. Like the mythic *uroboros* representing totality in the image of a serpent with its tail in its mouth, this part of the world is the point of a fateful convergence: the coming round, full circle, of the cycle of religions in the meeting of the *first* major religion, Hinduism, and the *last* major representative, Islam. The culture which flowed from such an archetypal merger is epitomised in a music, art and architecture of exquisite beauty and depth.

### MONOTHEISM AND POLYTHEISM

This image of completion/totality is evident in the inner and outer aspects of the two religions, Hinduism and Islam. In discussing the psychology of religion, I have elsewhere referred to the concepts of monotheism and polytheism which can be viewed as *both* psychological attitude and religious belief. Each can exist without the other. That is, one can have a polytheistic belief but a 'monotheistic' consciousness/attitude – as, for example, in fanaticism. Or, one can believe in a monotheism and have a 'polytheistic' attitude/consciousness – that is, a consciousness of equally valid, multiple perspectives. In sum, there is unity of God and diversity of divine manifestation. The basis of such a psychological 'polytheism' is evident even in the strict monotheism of Judaism in which the Torah has a myriad names, one for each Jew in exile. The proverbial ninety-nine names of Allah similarly reflect, in Islam, the inherent diversity of divine attributes. The uroboric merging of Hinduism and Islam in the subcontinent – personified by the syzygy of Lalla and Nuruddin in Kashmir – suggests



this interlocking between inner and outer, between Hindu 'polytheism' and Islamic 'monotheism'. The Bhakti movement in the Indian plains and the Rishis in Kashmir are just two examples of this unique fusion.

#### THE POLITICS OF PARADISE

Apart from being a locus of the closing of the *uroboros*, Kashmir also occupies a rather special place from another, albeit lesser-known perspective: the focus of a rather peculiar strain of scholarship which needs to be mentioned briefly. The majority of these scholars are British, French and German and the thrust of their documentation and analysis is quite dramatic and relatively unknown. I will refer very briefly to some of the main ideas.

For example, a large body of ethnographic, linguistic, archaeological, cultural and anthropological writing suggests that the area from Central Asia/Afghanistan to Kashmir is populated not only by Aryans and other races but also by those of Hebrew descent. Starting with Joseph Wolff's *Account of a Mission to Bokhara in the Years 1843-45*, there has been a steadily growing body of work which, in a cumulative fashion, has generated various hypotheses about what indeed seem to be unusual linkages with the Hebrews. While it is impossible to condense all of this extensive material into any coherent summary, one must reiterate and emphasize that this is not some sort of lunatic fringe, but a group of well-respected scholars/researchers who represent different disciplines and a body of scholarship spanning more than two hundred years. One can only speculate that the reasons for the current obscurity of this body of work have little to do with its authenticity and may possibly reflect the politics of knowledge in modern academia. Many women scholars are familiar with political constraints of this sort. Thus, however strange this body of knowledge may seem, one can only point to bibliographical sources and leave the reader to assess its relevance and validity within the context of the present discussion.

Holger Kersten's *Jesus Lived in India* is a controversial but fascinating exposition of what is undoubtedly an



elemental and strong linkage between different cultural aspects of Kashmir, and aspects of Hebrew culture. Among many other unusual ideas, Kersten suggests that Jesus may be buried in Kashmir. The connections that he draws range from the startlingly factual to the tenuous. It is all the more interesting since Kersten is not promoting any religious agenda as such – that is, he is not trying to 'prove' anything regarding Judaism, Christianity or Islam. On the contrary, his book is within the framework of Buddhism. However persuasive or bizarre one may find these ideas, the fact is that Buddhism too is very much part of Kashmir, the Ladakh area being primarily Buddhist even today.

The point here is not to discover what was the literal truth of things: whether Jesus is actually buried in Kashmir; whether the Afghans/Pathans/Kashmiris are one of the tribes of Israel or not, and so on. It is, rather, that over a period of centuries, in the popular and collective imagination, Kashmir seems to have become a point of convergence for the major world religions, as is evident not only in the work of eighteenth and nineteenth-century scholars and



explorers, but also, as Kersten notes, through indigenous narratives emanating from Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, Jewish and Christian sources. Thus, the attempt here is not to establish the literal truth but to discern a spiritual and symbolic *idea* and a different set of meanings underlying historical 'facts'.

(Excerpt from Professor Durre S. Ahmed's paper "Real' Men, Naked Women and the Politics of Paradise: The Archetype of Lal Ded', in *Gendering the Spirit: Women, Religion and the Post-colonial Response*. Durre Ahmed (ed). London. Zed Books. 2002)



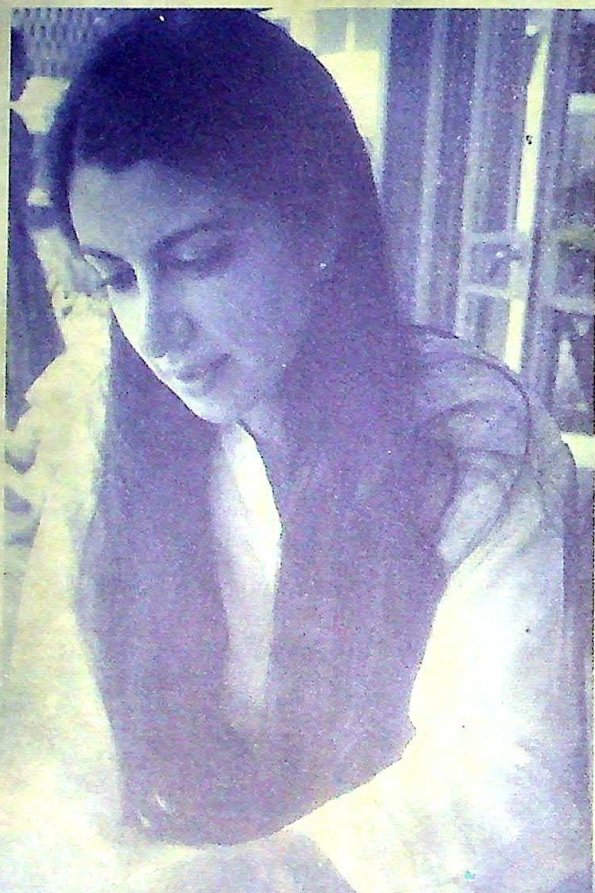
*Dr Durre S. Ahmed is Director, Graduate Program in Communication and Cultural Studies and Chairperson, Department of Academics, National College of Arts, Lahore. She is also visiting professor on Islam and Culture, at the Katholieke Hogeschool, Mechlen, Belgium. She is the author of Masculinity, Rationality and Religion: A Feminist Perspective (Lahore ASR, 1992) and editor and contributing author of Gendering the Spirit: Women, Religion and the Post-colonial Response (London, ZED Books, 2002). Her research and publications focus on issues related to gender, religion, women's spirituality and on Islam and the West. She is also a practicing psychotherapist and has Masters degrees in Psychology (Pb); Sociology (Columbia); Communication (Columbia); Education (Columbia) and a Doctorate in Communication and Education (Columbia).*



## SO PERSONAL, SO REAL

Seeing this turmoil and conflict, it feels like we grew up in a different era and century when one could roam the lanes and nooks and roads of the Valley with absolute gay abandon and bliss, with not an inkling of how things would turn and spiral into this unbelievable anguish and pain and the joy of growing up freely and normally would be so elusive to the children of Kashmir...

Is there no way the human spirit can rise above all this and make peace happen, so that people live a normal life and the smiles return to the faces of the youngsters there?



*Shameem Abdullah is a person from Kashmir now living in Delhi, working at reviving the old weaves, designs and methods of embroideries used in Kashmiri shawls and garments.*





### A LOVE POEM FOREVER

Kashmir means poetry to me, an unending love poem – love for the beautiful landscape, the lofty mountains, the flowers, the streams, the beautiful people...

My birthplace, Baramulla, with its stretches of vast apple orchards, my childhood with friends dancing and prancing in the fields, the school where I grew up with friends with beautiful names and faces without any problems of what they were socially... whenever I think of it all, I still feel like lifting my hands above my head and dancing and whirling with abundance till the whole universe joins me.

In my childhood Kashmir, there was also poverty but people took it in their stride, working hard singing enchanting love songs of the queen poetess, Habba Khatoon, *bhajans* and Sufi songs, instead of crying or fighting all the time about their plight. During the summer and springtime, every young and old face would bloom like the flowers around them. Even today, wherever I may go, the sounds, the colours and the fragrance of my birthplace travel with me. I always pray and hope every time I go there that, very soon, Kashmir will become even better than what it was during my childhood... that the beautiful, unending love poem will continue embracing everyone with love, compassion and brotherhood, and the Valley will reverberate with beautiful sounds all over again.



Professionally a doctor, Mahinder Tak, brought up in the beautiful valley of Srinagar, moved to the US to do her specialisation in radiation (oncology). Today, she is co-chair of the Democratic National Committee's Indo-American Council and also noted as one of the largest collectors of Indian art in the US. Her regular travels back and forth to her family in the Valley, help her remain connected. She is, as she says, 'a Kashmiri at heart'.



# kashmir shaviṣm and sufiṣm





## A DIALOGUE

ON 'SHIVARATRI', A STUDENT (S) AND TEACHER (T) MEET AT THE UNIVERSITY CAFÉ. THE STUDENT IS FROM KASHMIR.

*She is a Muslim but, as her surname suggests, her ancestors were Kashmiri Pandits. The teacher, a Hindu, with whom she is in a dialogue, is also her MPhil supervisor and has taught her in many courses over the years that she has been at this university.*

*The dialogue is imaginary, but could well have taken place.*

T: It's good to see you again... now that you've completed your MPhil, that too on a topic close to your heart – Kashmir – which is also the subject of Salman Rushdie's latest novel, *Shalimar, the Clown*. It's interesting how you have brought in Sufism, the legacy of Kashmir, which now seems to be forgotten, if not denied. But today, it may be appropriate to talk about Kashmiri Shaivism, which too is rapidly disappearing from the land of its birth.

S: What is the point of talking either about Shaivism or Sufism when my homeland is still bleeding?

T: True, but today is Shivaratri. Some ancestral voices might be whispering to you its importance and auspiciousness.

S: Yes, I understand that Shaivism used to be the religion of the people in Kashmir long ago. Many Kashmiri Pandits will certainly keep a fast today and a vigil tonight.

T: There are several legends about Shivaratri, and one of them has to do with the union of Shiva and his consort Parvati. Today is their wedding day and tonight their merger.

S: What makes that so special?

T: There's a story about that...

Shiva's spouse, as you know, is devoted to him. In life after life, she wants only Shiva for her husband. To this end she practises untold austerities. In this *avatar*, one of the many names she is known by is Aparna – leafless – eating or wearing not even a leaf during her *tapas* to obtain her heart's highest desire – Shiva.

Now, as if to test her husband's fidelity, she asks Shiva, who wears around his neck a garland of skulls, "Lord, whose heads are those?"

Shiva replies, "They are yours, my beloved, because in every birth we have been together. To remember each of those shared lifetimes and not be apart from you for even a single instant, I wear these skulls like a bridal garland."

Parvati, at first, feels flattered... how very devoted her husband is! Then a doubt crops up in her mind.

"But, Lord, where are the heads from *your* previous lives?"

Shiva smiles, "Empress of the world, I have no previous lives and no lives to come."

Parvati, astounded and a little startled, "How is it that you have no births and deaths, while we die and are re-born?"

Shiva: "Ah, to become eternal you have to come to know your true self, your real nature."

Parvati says, "I beseech you, Lord, reveal that to me."

Shiva replies, "I was waiting for this moment. You were so happy simply to be with me from life to life that you didn't ask me the secret of eternal life. Today you have, and so I shall reveal it to you."

T: Well, as you can see, this is a sort of 'Tantra', with Shiva as teacher and Devi as student; but there are many others in which the roles are reversed, where Devi is the teacher and Shiva the student.

[105]



S: Nice. But I thought Shivaratri celebrates the marriage of Shiva and Parvati as you just said.

T: Yes. But not just the marriage of Shiva and Parvati. This is the night in which they literally become one. Shiva embraces his lovely consort in such a manner that he cedes half his body to her. She, thus, forever occupies half his being. They become a conjoint figure – the left half female, the right half male. This figure is called 'ardhanarishwara' or 'ardhanarishwari'. Their union is at last complete; nothing can tear them asunder now.

This is the true meaning of marriage – two becoming one!

S: *Mashallah!* And what about the garland of skulls story?

T: It is at this juncture that Shiva, seeing that Parvati is ripe to receive the ultimate wisdom, reveals to her that her true nature is not apart from him who is the Absolute itself.

Shiva: "Now, my Beloved, you too will have no more births and deaths because you now know the secret of eternal life. And, henceforth, we will never be separate because today we have become one, merged in the Absolute."

T: The moral is simple: Jiva=Shiva; they are not separate.

S: This is a good story, but what about my homeland? I am deeply concerned about Kashmir, as I said earlier. We used to believe that there was something special about it. We thought that 'Kashmiriyat' was our unique gift to India and to the world.

While India and Pakistan were partitioned, Kashmir, a Muslim-majority state, remained in India as if our Kashmiriyat had defied the perverse logic of the two-nation theory. In Kashmir, the founder of Kashmiriyat, though not the first great star of the Sufi pantheon, was Sheikh Nur-ud-din. Out of love and veneration, the Hindus and Muslims called him Nund Rishi. Kashmiri Pandits also called him Sahzanand or 'simply blissful'. His shrine, Charar-e-Sharif, which the militants attacked and burned down, is sacred to Muslims and Hindus. And we thought our faith could transcend religious divisions and boundaries.

T: Both Hindus and Muslims also claim Lal Ded or Lalla Arifa or Laleshwari.

She said: "Shiva is All-Pervading.

Do not differentiate between a Hindu and a Muslim.

If you have understanding, then realise your own self.

In truth, this is the means to realise God."

Another Sufi saint, Baba Nasr, said:

"Oh Hindus and Muslims! How will you attain salvation if you don't take good deeds with you?"

S: We thought that Kashmiri Sufism, to use Yogendra Sikand's phrase, could give us the 'theological resources for peace-building' (<http://www.countercurrents.org/kashmir-sikand210706.htm>, accessed on 6 March 2008), but now half of Kashmir is in Pakistan. In the other half, there is a repressive force of occupation of the Indian state.

T: But I should imagine that things are better than they used to be. I remember when you came to Delhi five years back, how bad the conditions were.

S: I myself had learned to use a weapon in those days. People I knew had disappeared; some were tortured, others killed. Many of my friends became militants. But of course those days are now in the past. We don't believe that the solution lies through the barrel of a gun, but see how fragile the 'peace' is... in fact, there is no peace at all, if a non-issue like the Amarnath row can tear us apart.



T: What you said about Kashmiriyat earlier is quite interesting. Do you know that there was also a thing called 'Punjabiyaat'? Again, the shared spiritual heritage was said to be its foundation. Not only the great Sufis and Sants of Punjab such as Baba Farid and Bulleh Shah, but all the Sikh Gurus also preached a similar gospel of love. What you describe as unique to Kashmir was, in fact, available all over India in one form or another. Remember Kabir who had both Hindu and Muslim devotees?

S: But in Kashmir the whole culture of the people was fashioned by the mingling of several religious and spiritual traditions – Hindu, Buddhist, and then Muslim. Of course, Islam triumphed in the Valley.

T: Of course, but those who believe they are chosen to be the only custodians of truth, think they can remain so only if they convert everyone to their own ways or – exterminate them! Fortunately, neither seems to be God's plan for us – whatever you may do, the diversity of ethnicity, language and religion remains on earth. This is a fact.

S: But why should we be the victims of this? You got two nations, but we got nothing except bloodshed.

T: As long as we do not learn to coexist, there doesn't seem to be a way out, don't you think?

S, after a pause: True!

T: I should like to quote a line to you from Ramachandra Gandhi's book, *Svaraj: A Journey with Tyeb Mehta's Santiniketan Triptych*, "Hinduism and Islam have been brought together by providence on this subcontinent so that the whole world may benefit from their peaceful coexistence and creative cooperation" (p. 195).

S: I suppose the medieval Islamic conquerors and historians too thought that the coming of their religion and rule to the subcontinent was providential, except they had a different idea of providence. They thought that all of India would be converted into Dar-ul-Islam.

T: But when that has not happened...

S: Some of their descendants continue to believe in it and think that by waging *jihad*, this will eventually be accomplished.

T: Suppose they are wrong, wrong in the sense that theirs is a false interpretation of the Holy Writ?

S: Then we are fated to live together, perhaps to learn from either...

T: Also to *love* each other, as the Sufis advise...

S: Which seems difficult, if not impossible...

T: There is no escape from love. That is what the Sufis say.

S: Why, think of *Shalimar, the Clown*. Isn't that what Rushdie and a hundred Bollywood films advocate?

T: Yes.

S: But how to love? How to arrive at love when every heart is seething with hatred?

T: Love is our true inheritance and, therefore, the way to our future. But love is not just idealistic and romantic, it is supremely practical. To modify another line of Ramubhai's, I would say that it would be suicidal for us to wage war against our own 'subcontinental inheritance of integral spirituality' (*ibid* p. 196).

S: 'Integral spirituality' – if that is indeed what providence had in mind, we had already achieved it here in Kashmir.



T: True. And it is this heritage that we need to revive and ratify.

S: And you think it can be done through Kashmiri Sufism?

T: Certainly, but only if this Sufism is embedded in its own native soil in Kashmir.

S: What do you mean?

T: My point is – any discussion of Kashmiri Sufism will be incomplete without talking about the ground from which it sprang.

S: In other words, there are, once again, two ways of constructing the history of Sufism in Kashmir – we can do it in a divisive or an integrative manner.

T: Exactly. But, please, it's not just a matter of construction – look at the history, look at the evidence, look at the 'facts'.

S: Whatever we may mean by that.

T: Kashmir gave the world one of the most completely worked out systems of non-dual, yet theistic spirituality.

S: Will you please explain?

T: Well, Kashmir Shaivism considers Shiva to be the Supreme Being. In that sense it is theistic – like Vaishnavism or Christianity. But it is also radically different from the other theistic systems in that it allows no separation between Shiva and the rest of creation.

S: Creation?

T: I should correct that – manifestation. There is nothing apart from Shiva. Everything is Shiva.

S: We are also Shiva? If so, why are we partial, incomplete, flawed, sinful?

T: Other systems will say there is a devil, a *shaitan*, who tempts you, or they will say there is original sin. Of course, even in these systems, if God is omnipotent, then Satan is only doing His bidding; if He is omniscient, then ignorance is impossible; if He is omnipresent, then we cannot be sinful.

S: And in Kashmiri Shaivism?

T: Here it is argued that whatever incompleteness we experience, it has to do with our own self-veiling. In other words, Shiva veils himself and he also unveils himself.

S: Why would anyone do that?

T: Why do you play hide-and-seek? It's for the fun of it. But, more seriously, it is an assertion of both ontological and metaphysical non-separateness.

S: How is this linked to Sufism?

T: The Sufis too suggest a 'unity of being', the non-separation of the whole created world from the Creator.

S: You see, there is fundamental confusion about what is meant by Sufism or, for that matter, any wisdom tradition.

T: Yes?

S: If by Sufism you mean something sectarian, exclusive to one faith or religion, then it becomes divisive. But if you turn it into all things for all people, it loses its distinctive characteristics.

T: Precisely. Therefore, you need a hermeneutics which can do justice to both its generality and its particularities. The latter will always be plural because Kashmiri Sufism will differ from Deccani Sufism or Bengali Sufism or Iraqi Sufism, and so on.

S: Are you suggesting that Sufism, by and of itself, doesn't free us from exclusivism and sectarianism?

T: It depends on the kind of Sufism you propound.

S: So we are back to our earlier point about the interpretation of providence.

T: That's it: are we meant to coexist or to conquer, subdue, convert one another? What kind of Sufism or Shaivism do you promote – the one that stands for love and unity or for hatred and exclusivity?

S: At any given point, it would seem that both possibilities coexist.

T: Which is why we must choose.

S: Suppose I choose conquest, subjugation, conversion. Suppose I am stronger than you?

T: Today you may be stronger, but if tomorrow I am stronger, then what happens? Will those who live by the sword agree to perish by the sword with equal alacrity? History shows us that we love victory but not defeat. If we truly love God, both victory and defeat should be the same to us because both come from God.

S: Why not think that victory comes from God but defeat comes from our own misdeeds?



T: The Biblical Jews thought so; ostensibly Iqbal in his great poem 'Shikwah aur Jawab-e-Shikwah' also made a similar point.

S: But that suggests duality...

T: Precisely – God cannot be selectively omnipotent. All sovereignty resides with God at all times; you cannot give him credit for some things and not for others.

S: If God alone is the doer, then is He responsible for all the woes in this world?

T: Of course He is, as He is for everything else – or else, he is not involved and is a neutral witness; if so then we ourselves create our destinies or destroy them – according to the immutable law of Karma.

S: As the Buddhists believe.

T: Yes, the Buddhists are atheists – they do not believe in a creator God. According to them, good actions will yield good fruits while bad actions bad ones – we alone are responsible for what the world is.

S: In which case, those who are stronger will prevail.

T: We'll have to see what is stronger – love or hate, *ahimsa* or violence.

S: The jury is still out on that.

T: Yet, if 'an eye for an eye' was the universal basis of conduct – we would all, as Gandhi said, have been blind by now.

S: In the short term violence seems to work very well.

T: Does it? It only begets violence. To end violence, one has to stop being violent.

S: This sounds like a weak defence.

T: Well, here are two versions of the same position: the weak version is that violence doesn't work, so we must eschew it; the strong version is that we must eschew it even if it works!

S: So, I might actually have the power to defeat or destroy you, but I mustn't?

T: Just because you have the power, that doesn't make your action right, either in the eyes of man or God, does it? So we must not succumb to moral expediency dictated by political pragmatism.

S: Why don't we return to Sufism?

T: And love?

S: Why love?

T: Because love is the glue that holds it all together. Sufism is nothing if we forget that it is essentially about love – loving God, loving each other, loving all of this glorious creation.

S: Isn't Shivaratri also, in the ultimate analysis, a love story?

T: Supreme love ends separation. It ends duality. It reminds us that we are one.

S: Hindu and Muslim, Indian and Pakistani, man and woman, world and God... Shaivism and Sufism.

T: Om!

S: Ameen!





زُونِي

# OF THE BATED BREATH

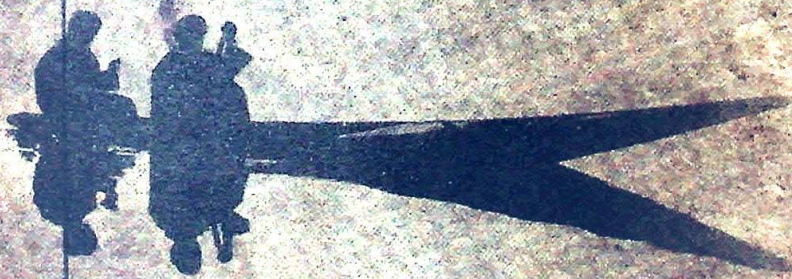


The Pilgrim, the pilgrimage  
and the way are journey  
from self to Self Farid al din

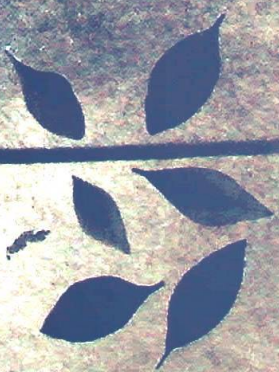




*a journey into history  
into nature and mind,  
thought, mysticism and beauty  
unparalleled in their  
attainment and manifestation*



*From the knowledge of certainty  
to the eye of certainty  
to the truth of certainty*



**THROUGH YEARS OF GROWING UP,**  
ONE FELT SURE THAT 'HISTORY' JUST  
meant exactly what it said. Both its syllables seem to say it  
all, without fuss. That it was story after story after story that  
happened to our species as the years went by. 'His' seemed as  
good as hers, like man was inclusive of humankind, almost  
naturally, no questions asked or needed. And because king,  
leader, hero represented a whole people, 'his story' applied  
to almost all, certainly to most, in some way or other.

And so it was one story leading to another. One more  
interesting than the other. Maybe one or two that made  
little sense, but then another that you simply did not ever  
want to end.

So the dates, names, places were serious facts to be  
memorised – about stories that had no re-telling. What  
escaped one often was that more interesting than the  
very famous stories were the lurking, undiscovered ones.  
Some were in history books, some were made up, some  
were crafted with aching skill to near perfection. And  
told so well, you wished you had been the one who had  
done the telling.

So history repeatedly made literature occur, literature and  
folklore.

Right this minute, many may rush to your mind. And the  
ones to settle and stay would be the single-minded ones;  
centering staunchly around one person, one obsession,  
one idea, one inevitable yet surprising end. And for that  
story to adhere and reappear, intense emotion would be the  
undercurrent.

And even if neglected and not re-told time and again, this  
kind of story would not wilt. It would enrich even the  
woodwork as much as the page or the screen.  
Zooni's was one such life and story.



Vo kaun thhi, kya naam thha  
Honton pe gehri khamoshi.  
Uss aansuni aavaaz mein  
Ek ankaha paighaam thha...

(Who was she, what was her name? -  
Her lips were deeply stilled as though sealed.  
In her unheard voice  
Was this unspoken message...)



And equally yearning are the lines:

Hayrat se mayn takta raha  
Vo hoor se thhi kuchh siva  
Vo pal na bhooloonga kabhi  
Vo pal ajab eenaam thha.

(I gazed at her, amazed  
She could very well have been a *hoori*  
That moment I will not forget  
That moment, what a wondrous reward.)



Yes, as the lines of poet Shahryar and composer Khayyam resound, Zooni's is one such life, one such story. Zooni of the Moon, Zooni of several hundred years ago, deeply fascinating then, the same now.  
And clearly, way back twenty-five years ago, it did get hold of a whole bunch of rather extraordinary of people.

Elsewhere in this journal, Muzaffar Ali half takes you on the 'Zooni' voyage his handpicked team undertook. The west and east collaborated here, their hearts and souls in the right place. James Killough was writing the screenplay in elaborate detail, Riutchi Sakamoto was doing the inspired background music while Khayyam was composing Shahryars' lyrics into song. As committed was Behram Manocheri, an international talent originally from Iran (worked with Mike Leigh in London) who was both Sufi and a *santoor* player.

Zooni had entered the bloodstream of this talent which gathered and mingled to know her, figure her out and recreate her. And in the process, seriously and practically settling in - to work and revive the imagination, the skills, the brainwaves and the diligence of the neglected local. Despite the ravages in Kashmir, it started, it happened, it refused to give up. And then it had to.



As Mary Mcfadden, the world's most coveted designer at the time, writes in her book, how only the most dire straits could stop her and the entire Zooni crew to abandon this heartfelt mission. For they had settled lock, stock and barrel, made themselves at home, to recreate this myth for the rest of us.

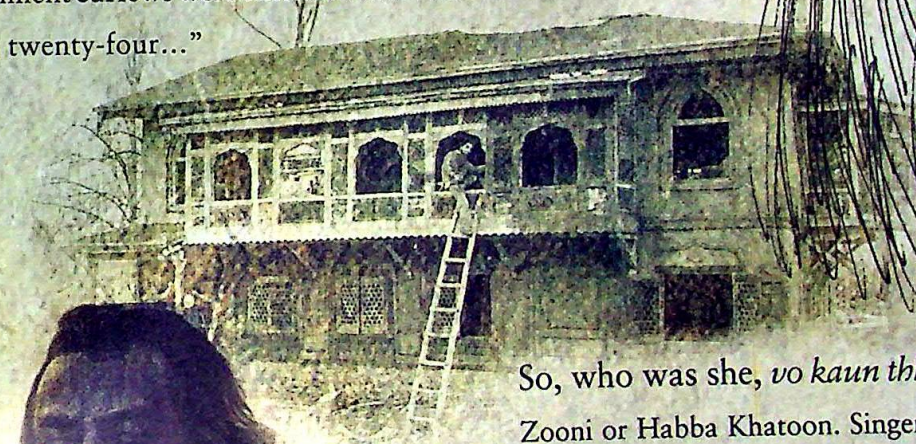
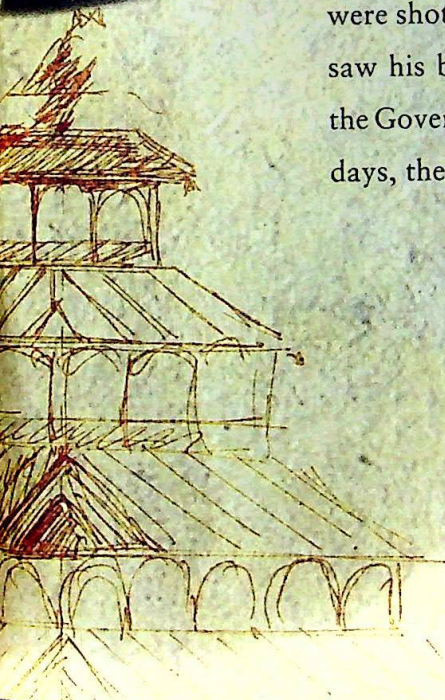
"As the storm of civil war spread through the Valley, security on the set became a real problem. We took over the village of Harwan... there we built a set, trading a school bus for the two-storeyed house, that the Director designed and hand-built.

It was to serve two purposes. We hoped after the film had finished it would be turned into a workshop for the crafts we had created for the film. Sadly, that idea was smashed with the civil unrest. The set became a fortified sanctuary (I love those two words) with military protection. For safety, the stars were flown from the airport by helicopter. The entire Valley was under house-arrest. We could not play our radios; we could not go outside. People were shot at sight. James Killough, the scriptwriter, saw his building blow up behind him. Eventually, the Government curfews were extended to seventeen days, then twenty-four..."

*Habba Khatoon is to be a manifestation of a special dimension of Sufism in its most contemporary application.*



[113]



So, who was she, *vo kaun thhi?*

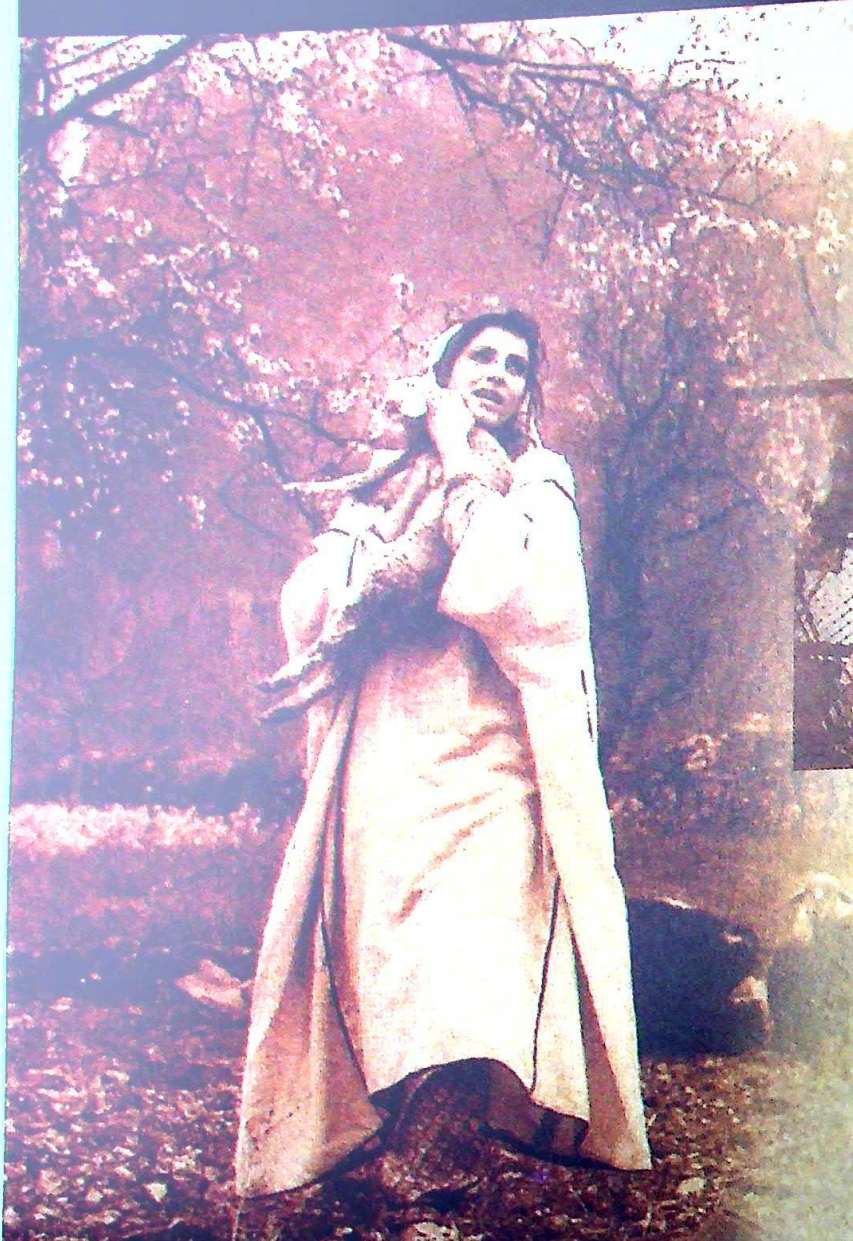
Zooni or Habba Khatoon. Singer or Sufi. The chosen one or the beleaguered one.

Beloved or thwarted. Honoured and cherished – or humiliated and dumped? Strangely, both those, all of those.

North of Srinagar is a village called Chandahar. Where one night more than four hundred years ago, the moon shone full and bright as the Sufi Saint Khalilullah carried his god daughter to christen her Zooni... or of the Moon. She was the daughter born to Jaanam and Abdi Rathur who rejoiced in her even as Saint Baba Khalilullah predicted that her life would wax and wane, glow and dim, just as the moon.







Now Zooni is twenty-four and not married, which is a scandal. She fits into no mould, which is most inconvenient. Marriage to the surly carpenter Aziz Lon is then mooted and she opposes it unbending – because she despises the man. But her unwillingness to marry a man she loathes is defeated by her mother's fast unto death. She relents.



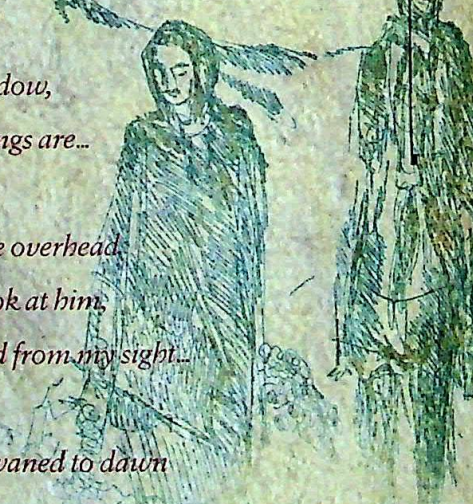
The story has many almost startling ins and outs... it must be read and it must be seen.

And the cries of Zooni, the poetess, in song after song, tell beautifully of the love that brims in her, unembarrassed. She writes and sings with the unstinted freedom that only a Sufi can call her own. Here some lines are culled, with apologies – for they are not an entirety, nor are they in the original Kashmiri:

*He glanced at me through my window,  
He who is as gorgeous as my earrings are...*

*He gazed at me through the crevice overhead.  
Like a bird he sang to make me look at him.  
Then whisper-footed, just vanished from my sight...*

*He gazed at me as the moonlight waned to dawn  
Stalked me, he was obsessed by me –  
Tell me, why did he stoop so low?  
I, the sad one, I so long for him.*



Zooni grows up beautiful but different. She is spirited, she plays, she tends sheep each day, and more than all and everything else, she enjoys singing. And this is very far from the proper thing for a growing girl to be doing. But there is no stopping Zooni. To her it's her life and it leads her to the truth that her mentor believes she must pursue, unafraid. Her voice, her singing, her verses which pour out of her, are magnetic for those around her and lauded by her Baba. She grows then into her charmed yet blighted romance with Yusuf... the Prince who she only knows as a Sufi. The drama of her discovering his identity, in court as she fights her case, is a crescendo that is made for cinema. Inherent in the story is human pain, and the extraordinary, almost full-blessed beauty of the vale, is a pathetic fallacy; it does not mitigate the anguish, one whit:

*Makhmoor hawaan se sanbhalta hi nahin dil  
Aye jaan-e-jigar aaja, behalta hi nahin dil.*  
(Even the intoxicating breeze will not manage my heart  
Come, my beloved, come, for nothing will distract this heart.)

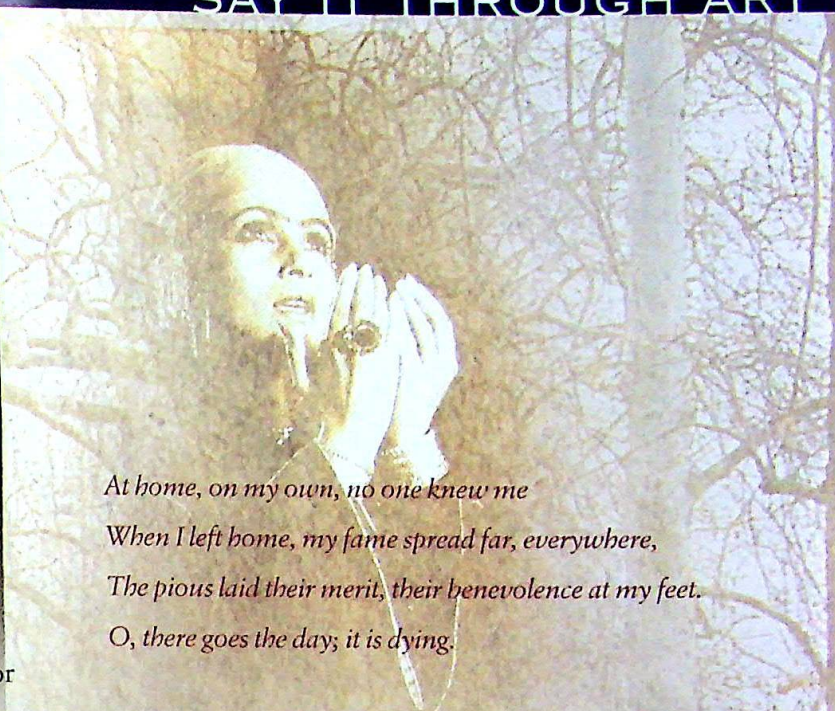






Take the Sufi Baba or the stranger, village urchin or monarch, parent or infant, each of the sheep she knew well and tended – or all the crowds that gathered to hear her who she did not. To and for each one, Zooni felt and sang a sanguine and despairing love. In fact, the only sharp lacuna in her life, about which she was entirely honest, was the man she did not love, her husband, Aziz Lon. Without love, she did not accept him. And to him, even as his wife, she did not relent.

To the Kashmiri language, Habba Khatoon gave a literary form, melding both musical styles, Persian and Indian. She liberated women to adorn themselves; she revived the Circassian custom of using special dyes and powders to tattoo face and hands. She amazed her people as queen, as she had amazed them as their peasant maiden. She sang far and wide the outcry of a people suppressed. Zooni's songs live and resound in the Valley when least expected, rising readily to anonymous fans and to lips otherwise not vociferous.



*At home, on my own, no one knew me  
When I left home, my fame spread far, everywhere,  
The pious laid their merit, their benevolence at my feet.  
O, there goes the day; it is dying.*

*My beauty was a storehouse of dear, rare merchandise,  
Which from every quarter drew men to me.  
Now all my richness has gone, so has all my worth:  
O, there goes the day; it is dying.*

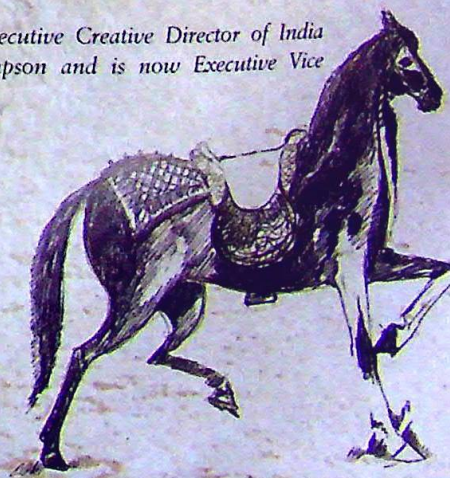
Leafing through the script of Zooni, Habba Khatoon, I was bemused at how simply it strung the epic web of her life, touching chord after chord. Laughing softly, growing up unafraid, daring sleet, snow and society, screaming, singing, wailing sadness. And all through, filling one acutely with a sense of life's many puzzles, even while leaving much unsaid.

"Give me a hero," said Scott Fitzgerald, "and I will give you a tragedy." Given a hero as timeless and genderless and headlong as Zooni, the tragedy could only be enveloping.

The day will surely come and soon. When Kashmir will want to be well and salubrious so that this girl-child of Kashmir can raise her voice once again, soaring over the din that all these years without her have been.



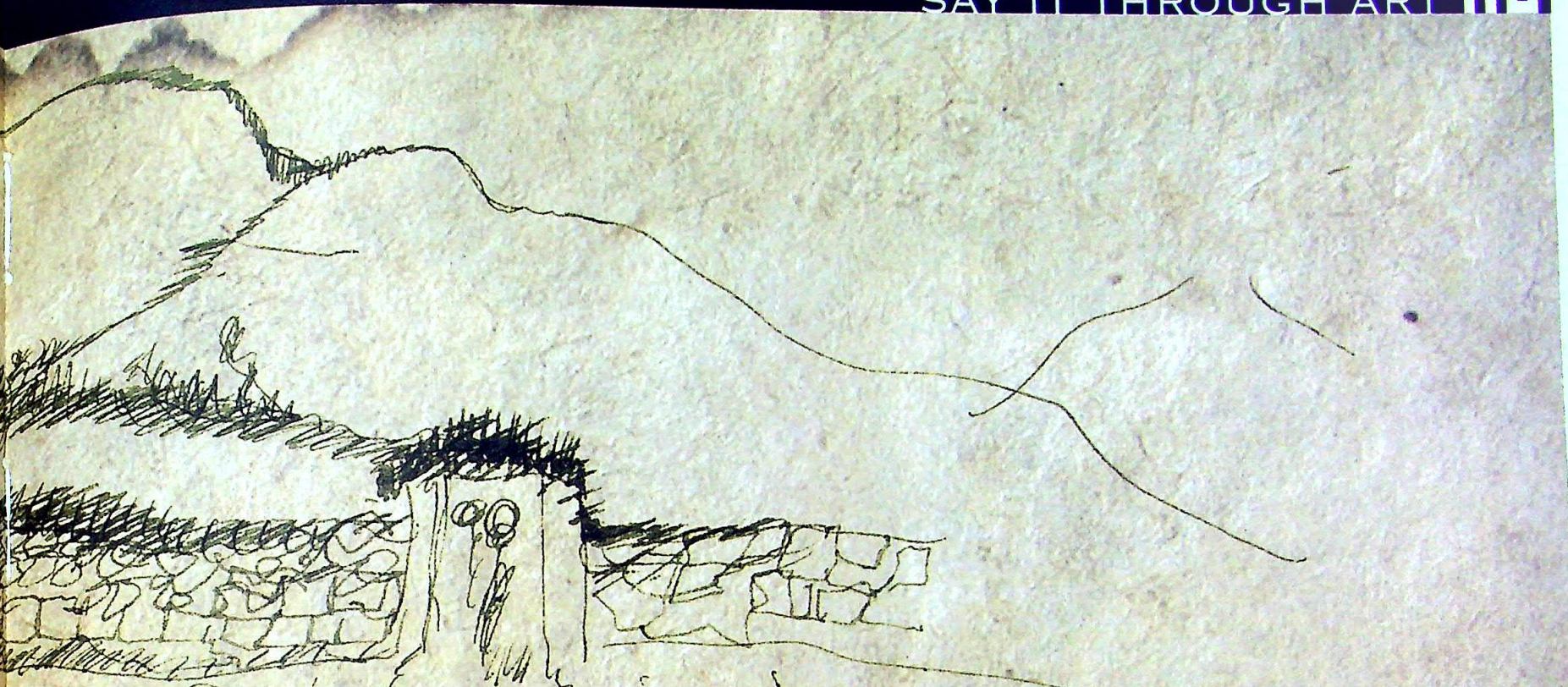
*Syeda Bilgrami Imam has been Executive Creative Director of India and Central Asia at J. Walter Thompson and is now Executive Vice President, Contract Advertising.*











TODAY, THE KASHMIRI IS CONSUMED BY FEAR... AND FREEDOM FROM FEAR MEANS SELF RESPECT AND SECURITY. THE NEED OF THE HOUR IS TO REMOVE FEELINGS OF ALIENATION AND HOSTILITY WHICH AMPLIFY THIS FEAR. CULTURE INSTILLS IN PEOPLE A SENSE OF BELONGING AND IDENTITY.

THE NEED OF THE HOUR IS TO DRAW PEOPLE OF THE WORLD TO KASHMIR AND CONVERSELY DRAW THE PEOPLE OF KASHMIR INTO THE INTERNATIONAL MAINSTREAM.

KASHMIR SERVES AS AN IDEAL SETTING FOR THE INDUSTRY OF ART AND CRAFT... WITH PANORAMIC MOUNTAINS AND DANCING MEADOWS. FLOWING STREAMS AND COLOURFUL ORCHARDS... TODAY IT IS DESERTED AND LOST... NO CRAFT TAKES SHAPE IN HOSTILITY AND BLOODSHED – NOTHING IS BORN WITHOUT INSPIRATION.

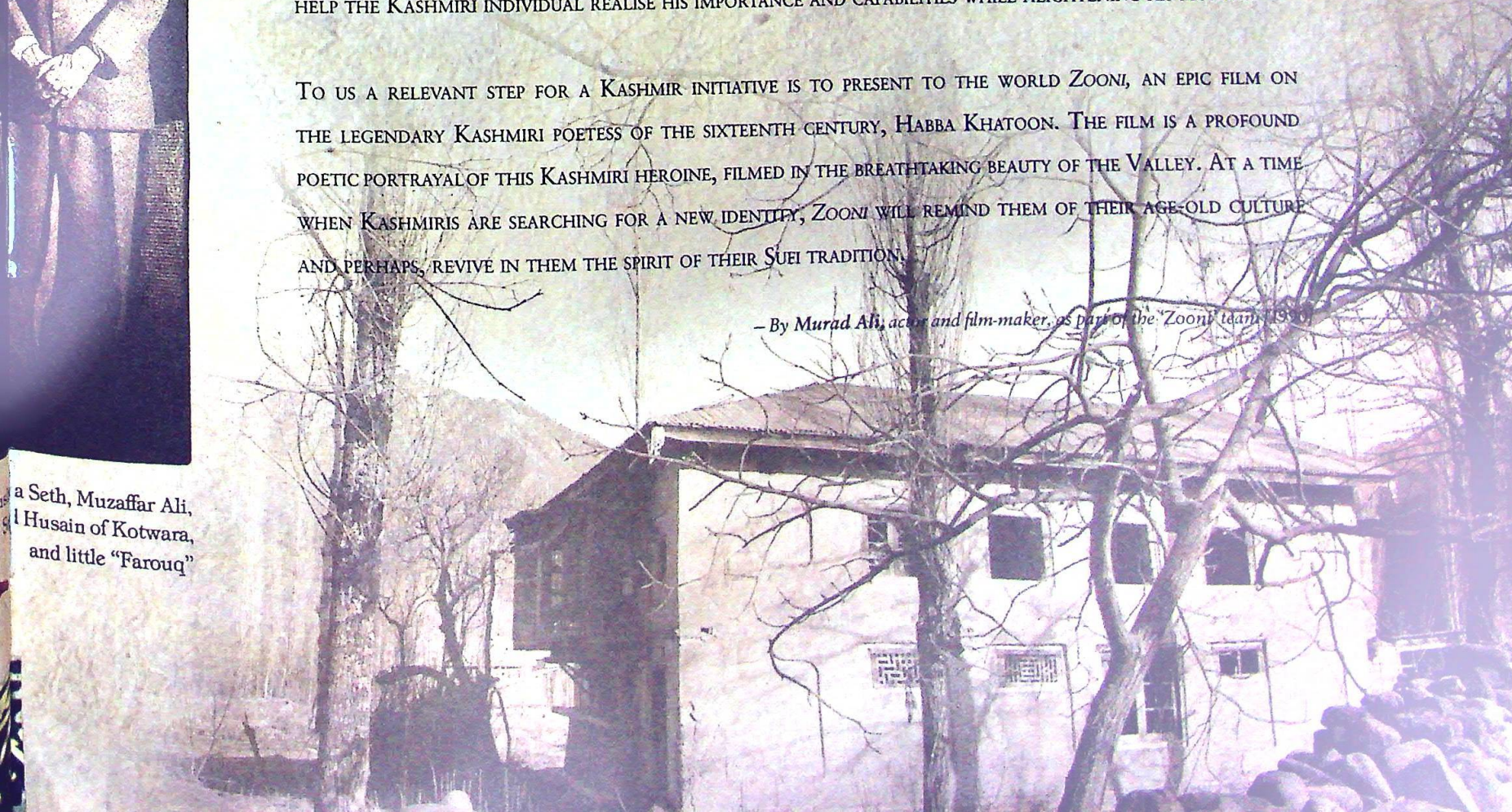
THE NEED OF THE HOUR IS TO VITALISE THE ARTISTIC POTENTIAL OF THE KASHMIRI CITIZEN WITH LOVE AND INSPIRATION, THEREBY ENABLING THE WORLD TO SEE KASHMIR IN A DIFFERENT LIGHT. ATTEMPT MUST BE MADE TO HELP THE KASHMIRI INDIVIDUAL REALISE HIS IMPORTANCE AND CAPABILITIES WHILE HEIGHTENING HIS MORALE.

TO US A RELEVANT STEP FOR A KASHMIR INITIATIVE IS TO PRESENT TO THE WORLD ZOONI, AN EPIC FILM ON THE LEGENDARY KASHMIRI POETESS OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY, HABBA KHATOON. THE FILM IS A PROFOUND POETIC PORTRAYAL OF THIS KASHMIRI HEROINE, FILMED IN THE BREATHTAKING BEAUTY OF THE VALLEY. AT A TIME WHEN KASHMIRIS ARE SEARCHING FOR A NEW IDENTITY, ZOONI WILL REMIND THEM OF THEIR AGE-OLD CULTURE AND PERHAPS, REVIVE IN THEM THE SPIRIT OF THEIR SUEI TRADITION.

— By Murad Ali, actor and film-maker, as part of the "Zooni" team (1990)



a Seth, Muzaffar Ali,  
I Husain of Kotwara,  
and little "Farouq"





### Why Lal Ded?

"In my brochure for *Lal Ded* I say it in two lines...

'What is the space that I inhabit in the world as a woman, as 'a-woman', as the uncompromised self, as the self that deals constantly with the world?

How do I live the dichotomies? And what is the existentialist *raison d'être* for us and the world we create? I found myself seeking Lal Ded for answers...'

When I started out to do the play, it was not just with Lal Ded but also with eleven women Bhakti poets. Lal Ded was one amongst them. And then at the end of a year, I found myself with four – Lalla, Meera, Akka and Andal. Two Shaivites and two Vaishnavites! Strange!

So there was a further pairing down, to Lalla and Meera. And, after sometime... it was just Lalla.

Her words created landscapes that I longed to enter.

The rhythms of her *vaakh* – they started playing inside me without my even understanding the meaning. She left images inside me that confounded and yet, seared me with their strange beauty and a yearning that I begin to feel.

Her relationship to the other / self / Shiva, or as she says, 'su va, su va, su va, su va', I feel, is *one to one*. It is so free of the 'reactive' – blame or anger, male or female agendas. It is even free of all physical architectural space...

With Lal Ded there is a refined, almost rarefied intelligence and grace, a compassion and an independence of being that is unmatched. I haven't felt this with any other Bhakti or Sufi poet."



*In the portrayal of her – what was the biggest challenge you faced?*

"Finding the aesthetic. In this case that was primary. The aesthetic. It meant – 'How do I make poetry into a physical gesture, into a visual landscape! How do I diffuse my body, to allow different *times* and spaces to emerge in the performance? How do I play the absence of an actual person so that her spirit and the essence of her, become embodied and palpable on the stage?'"

At the seminally important level of scripting, too, the aesthetic was what determined the structure of the script; it is what allowed all that material of two years of research and translations to fall into place."





*The epitome of what a Lal Ded was, can a woman of today identify with her?*

"With any *vaakh* of Lal Ded's, there is somehow no questioning the fact that it was written by a woman. And yet, there is no obvious clue that defines it as such (that it was written by a woman). I find this incredible about her poetry!

Lal Ded defied all stereotyping during her own lifetime, and *continues to do that seven hundred years later...* for any woman or man today (especially when we are living in a world so defined by the media), to be able to achieve *this!* What can be more liberating?"

*Any lasting impression/s of this saint-poet in you as a person, that you still carry close to your heart?*

"I personally think that any attempt to engage with Lal Ded is not at the level of impressions... it demands a journey and a transformation.

It took me three years... you know how every New Year's Eve puts you into stock taking mode? Well, every 31st December, for three years, the world would party and everyone had somewhere to go; I'd be sitting at home and thinking, 'Another year come to an end and I haven't yet cracked the play'. I was in angst.

Then one day, suddenly, the angst went away. Instead, I found myself saying to myself, 'How can I ever get close to understanding a woman who was not only a woman, but a phenomenon... how can I, until I am worthy of that understanding?'

Then I understood that I had to turn inward... I had to look really ruthlessly at my *own* life, at the bad fears that bound me, the way I was dealing with whatever my life was about those days, and I knew there was a lot of work I had to do, internally... So I threw aside the 'sensible', the 'practical' decisions I had been sticking by, and instead chose to give up every thought, every action and every decision that was anger / fear / ego driven. It made a lot of people close to me tell me that I was being weak or stupid or a 'loser', but I knew what it was.

Lalla says it better... *I seized my inner dark, brought it down, tore it and cut it to pieces.*

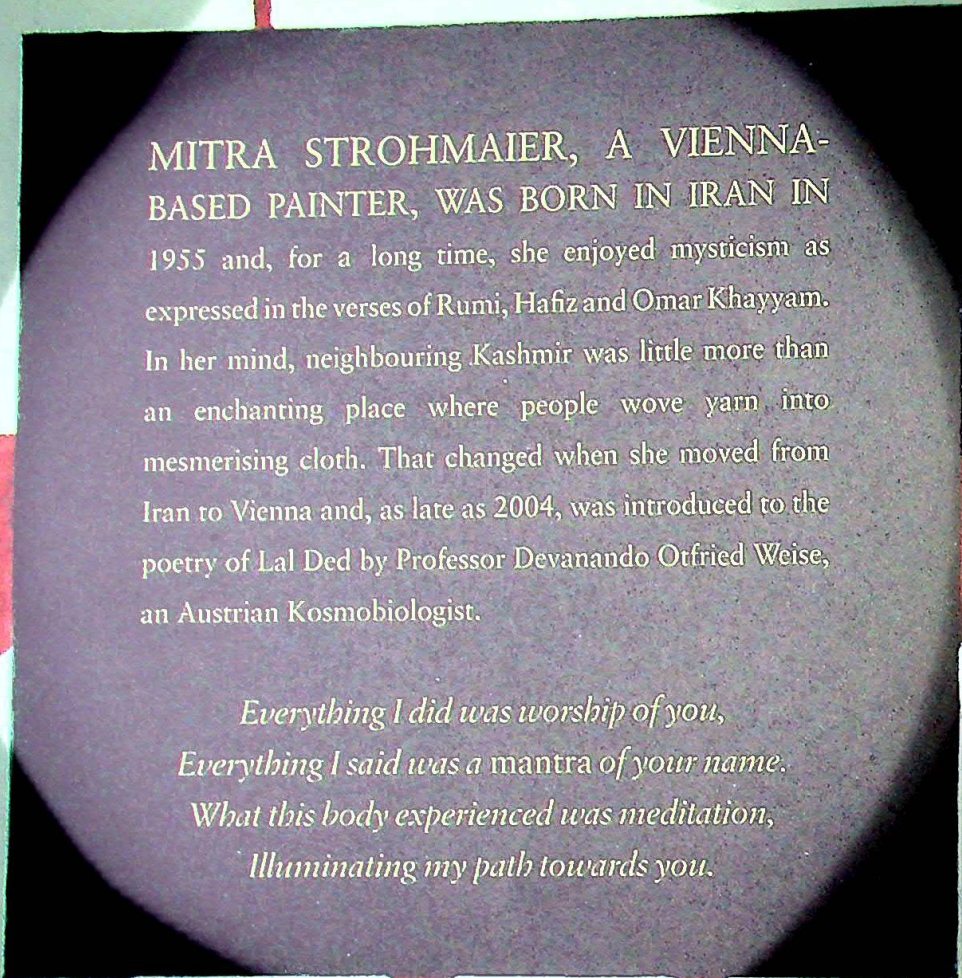
I really had to do that before I got anywhere with Lal Ded, and arrived at what is now, the play."

*Film, theatre and television actress, and writer, director and producer in all three media. Meeta Vasisht has also been visiting faculty at the NSD, FTII, NID and NIFT. She is the founder and creative director of MANDALA (space for Arts Collaboration Research and Education), a non-profit organisation that believes in the inherent power of the performing arts and crafts.*

LAL DED, conceived and enacted by Vasisht, was recently performed to packed houses at the 10th Bharat Rang Mahotsav (international theatre festival celebrating the 50th year of the National School of Drama, Delhi).







MITRA STROHMAIER, A VIENNA-BASED PAINTER, WAS BORN IN IRAN IN 1955 and, for a long time, she enjoyed mysticism as expressed in the verses of Rumi, Hafiz and Omar Khayyam. In her mind, neighbouring Kashmir was little more than an enchanting place where people wove yarn into mesmerising cloth. That changed when she moved from Iran to Vienna and, as late as 2004, was introduced to the poetry of Lal Ded by Professor Devanando Otfried Weise, an Austrian Kosmobiologist.

*Everything I did was worship of you,  
Everything I said was a mantra of your name.  
What this body experienced was meditation,  
Illuminating my path towards you.*

"It was so easy to fall in love with Lalla's poetry. After all it is all about love as expressed by a woman," recalls Mitra.

Each time she reads Lalla, she is filled with a burning desire to interpret the verses of the fourteenth century female mystic on canvas. It is the timeless yearning for truth of the human soul, particularly that of a woman, that makes Mitra feel so close to Lalla irrespective of the fact that the world of the two women are separated by eight centuries.

Over twenty-five paintings by Mitra already accompany the verses of the Kashmiri mystic poet that are translated into German in a book called *Lalla Die Glutvolle* or the passion of Lalla, published by Tabula Smaragdina in 2004.

MITRA  
Lalla



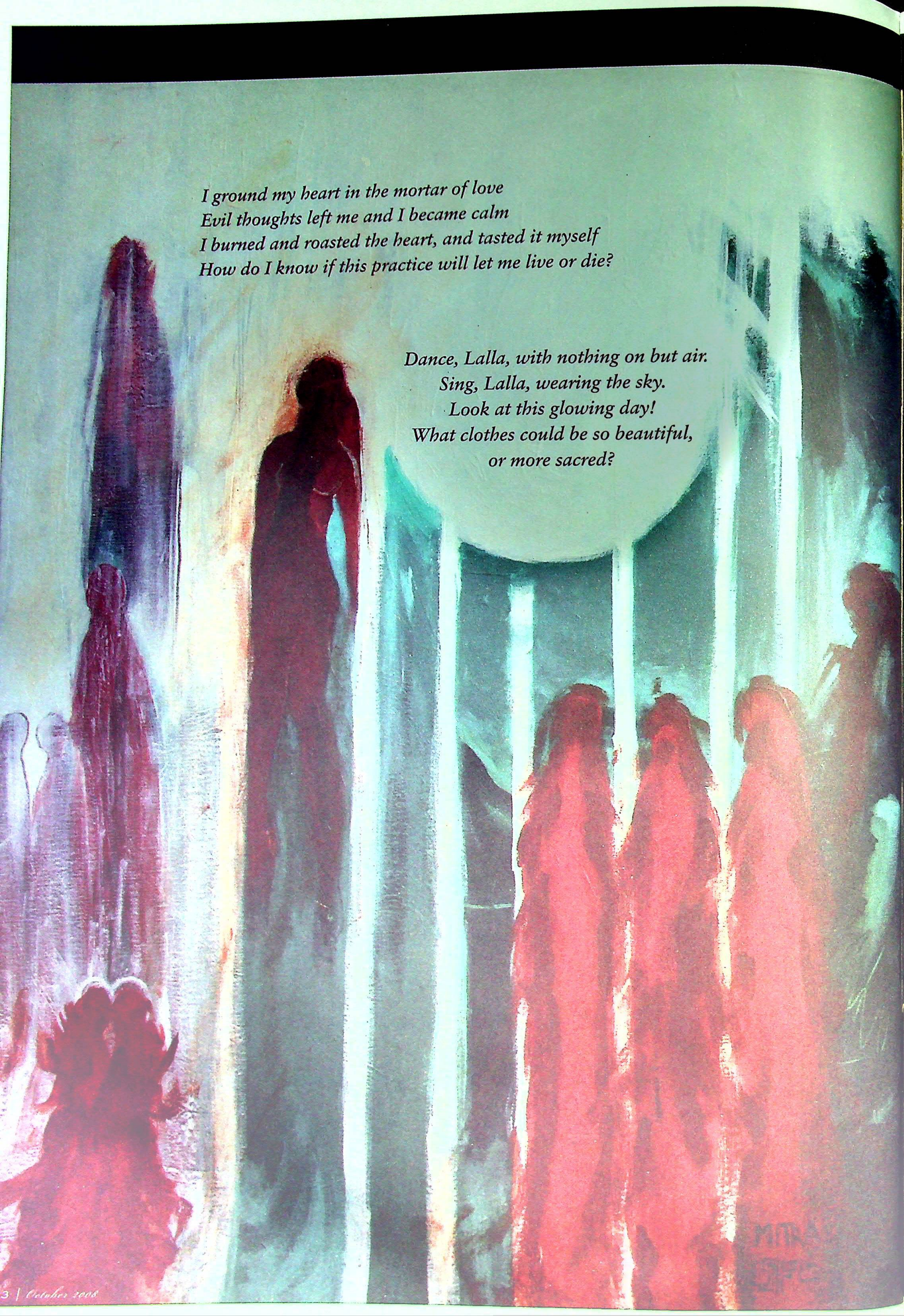
Mitra is most inspired by the idea that love was all that mattered to the struggling soul of Lalla. 'Love' to Lalla was perhaps even more important than the object that was loved, reminding Mitra of the state of mind of Jalaluddin Rumi, the thirteenth century Persian poet who said: "I face Mecca only for love of thy face / Else I should shun prayer and Mecca both."

*Self inside self. You are nothing but me.  
Self inside self, I am only You.  
What we are together  
Will never die.  
The why and how of this?  
What does it matter?*

*With passionate longing did I, Lalla, go forth.  
Seeking and searching did I pass the day and night.*

*Whatever your name is, Shiva, Vishnu,  
The genius who inspired Scherazade,  
Saviour of the Jains, the pure Buddha,  
Lotus-born God, I am sick.  
The world is my disease, and You are the cure,  
You, you, you, you, you, you, you.*

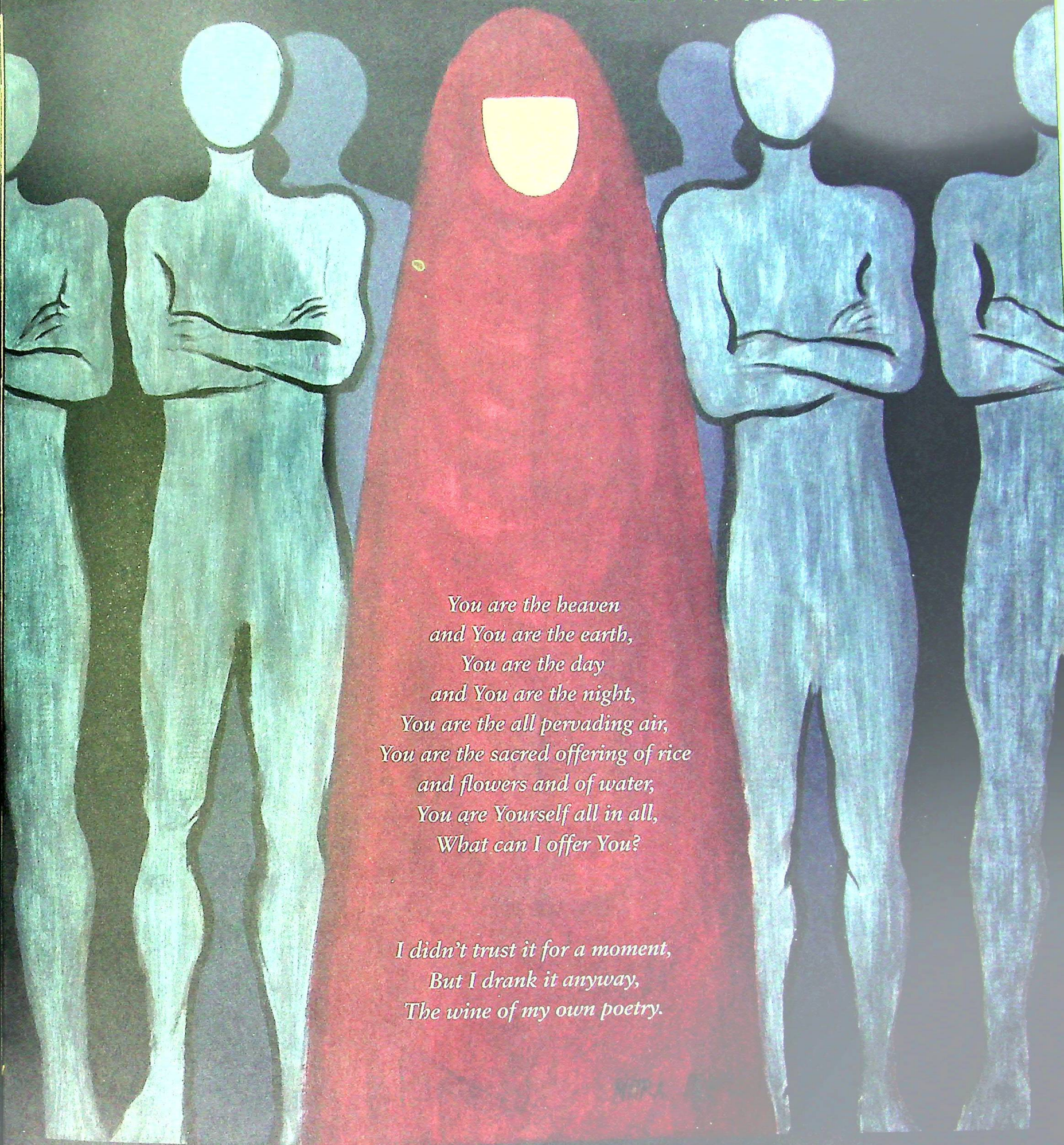


A painting of a temple interior. In the center, a large white dome is supported by several tall, slender white columns. To the left, a tall, narrow arched doorway is framed by a reddish-brown border. To the right, a similar arched doorway is visible. In the foreground, several figures are depicted in long, flowing red robes. On the left, a group of figures is gathered, with one figure in the foreground appearing to be in a dynamic pose. On the right, a group of figures stands near the arched doorway. The background is a mix of light and dark tones, suggesting a deep interior space. The overall style is expressive and somewhat abstract, with visible brushstrokes and a rich color palette dominated by reds, whites, and blues.

*I ground my heart in the mortar of love  
Evil thoughts left me and I became calm  
I burned and roasted the heart, and tasted it myself  
How do I know if this practice will let me live or die?*

*Dance, Lalla, with nothing on but air.  
Sing, Lalla, wearing the sky.  
Look at this glowing day!  
What clothes could be so beautiful,  
or more sacred?*





*You are the heaven  
and You are the earth,  
You are the day  
and You are the night,  
You are the all pervading air,  
You are the sacred offering of rice  
and flowers and of water,  
You are Yourself all in all,  
What can I offer You?*

*I didn't trust it for a moment,  
But I drank it anyway,  
The wine of my own poetry.*

MITRA'S INTERPRETATIONS OF LAL DED'S VERSES ON CANVAS.



By **Mehru Jaffer**, a Vienna-based journalist originally from Lucknow. She is the author of *The Book of Muhammad* published by the Penguin Group. Her book on Muinuddin Chishti will be released by Penguin India later this year, as the first part of a trilogy that includes the book of Nizamuddin Auliya and the book of Amir Khusrau.



# The Universe of the Breath



*'And remember when thy Lord said unto the angels:  
Lo! I am creating a mortal out of potter's clay of black mud altered.  
So, when I have made him and have breathed into him of My spirit...'*

Qur'an 15:28-29

THE QUR'ANIC VERSE ABOVE REVEALS, IN A VERY CONDENSED FORM, THE ENTIRE MYSTIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD AND HIS HUMAN creation. He says that He made the human being out of the elements and then breathed life into the body. The Qur'anic words used here are significant.

Allah uses the word *nafas* for His own breath, and He uses the word *ruh* for His own soul. These same words are used to mean the human breath and human soul – confirming the fact that we are originally from Allah, of Allah, for Allah, and in the end will return to Allah.

Of all of the physical realities that have a bearing upon health, that which is least often considered in medicine and healing is – the breath! The breath has the following important relations with health:

- ☉ It is the agent upon which the divine permission (*idhn*) is borne.
- ☉ Breath is responsible for conveying the divine attributes from the heart to the various centres of the mind, body and soul.
- ☉ Breath creates the equilibrium and harmony of the temperaments of the body.
- ☉ Breath carries life-supporting elements from the exterior of the body to the interior physiological functions.

Breath is not synonymous with air, or with oxygen. Breath is that which emerges from the divine origin and has, as its essence, the temperament of the celestial realms. Breath is a luminous substance, a ray of light; breath is the life force of God Himself!

Breath is the regulator of joy, sadness, delight, anger, jealousy and other emotions. Both the quantity and quality of breath have a definite and direct effect upon human health. This is so because various physical events can alter or, in a sense, cover over the divine essence that is being conveyed on the breath. Industrial pollutants, alcoholic beverages and various foods can all intermingle with the breath and disturb its intended purity of action.

All of these actions are changed by age, climate and habits. An example will make this clear. When one experiences great depression, there is a weakening of the natural powers and a concentration of the breath. This concentration causes a violent aggregation of the breath, which consequently obliterates part of the natural heat and gives rise to an imbalance of coldness. Depending upon how prolonged the depression is, the cold imbalance can extend into one or many organs of the body, thus producing varying degrees of disease.



The emotions of dread and the effects associated with great and impending danger also dissipate the natural heat. Anger will cause an increase in the amount of yellow bile essence created. If the anger is sustained, the diseases associated with excess yellow bile will occur.

Therefore, medicines must be chosen for their effect on the breath and its temperament (or its altered temperament). This is why compound medicines are frequently used to balance not only the physical symptoms but also the underlying temperaments of the physiological essences *and* the essences of the breath.

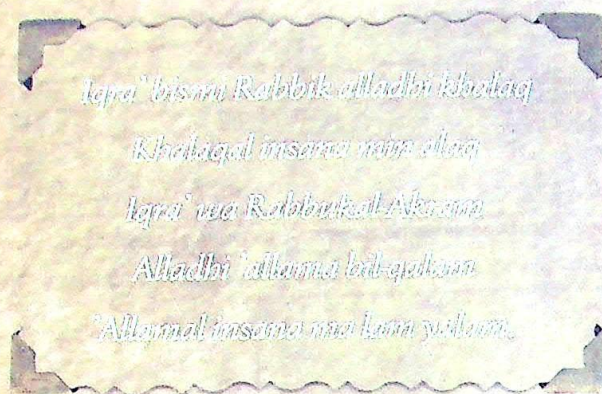
This is also why flower essences, in the form of *attars*, are so effective in producing cures. It is vital that they be given at the same time as medicines that strictly affect the physical symptoms. Flowers have the greatest capacity to rebalance the breath and the internal essential temperaments.

The breath is the nexus between our Creator and us. The healing methods of the Sufis have placed more importance upon the breath than on any other factor of life.

In February 1979, I received a letter from my old friend Yunus Maharaj, the head of the families who attend to the *dargah* of our Chishti headquarters at Ajmer. "Man does not come to earth to stay forever," he wrote. My heart was pounding, knowing what was to follow. "Hazrat Maulana Sufi Darveesh Wahiduddin Begg completed his breathing practices on the 12th of Rabia al-Awwal, AH 1400. It was an auspicious time, just after sunset. The day was more auspicious still: it was the birthday of the Prophet (s.a.w.s.)." Although there were many feelings I experienced in association with the passing of my Shaykh (may Allah cover him with mercy), I was struck by the unique view Yunus Maharaj had expressed to me – that life, considered from its beginning to end, is one continuous set of breathing practices. This is the view of the Sufis.

The Holy Qur'an, in addition to all else that it may be, is a set of breathing practices. In fact, the very first command of Almighty God was to recite the Qur'an. The first verses that

were revealed by Gabriel to Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.s.) were as follows:



(RECITE! IN THE NAME OF THY LORD  
WHO CREATETH MAN FROM A DROP OF SENSITISED BLOOD  
RECITE! AND THY LORD IS MOST BOUNTEOUS,  
WHO TEACHETH BY THE PEN  
TEACHETH MAN THAT WHICH HE KNEW NOT.)

The Arabic word *iqra'* is rendered here as 'recite' because it means to read from some book, from actual letters. Now, the Prophet (s.a.w.s.) was an *ummi*, an unlettered one who could not read or write so the command seemed puzzling, even terrifying, to him at the time. But the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.s.) was able to memorise each of the verses as it came to him, and thus could 'read' it from his memory, although actual physical written copies were produced during the lifetime of Muhammad (s.a.w.s.).

One of the Companions of the Prophet related this comment by Muhammad (s.a.w.s.) on the value of reciting the Qur'an: "Reciting the Qur'an out of memory carries one thousand degrees of religious merit, while reading the Qur'an from the Book itself increases [the merit] up to two thousand degrees."

The benefits and effects of reading the Qur'an are like a seed that eventually sends out twigs, branches, roots and leaves of sustenance in every direction. The Hadith state: "Whoever reads the Qur'an and acts upon what is contained in it, his parents will be made to wear a crown on the Day of Judgement, the brilliance of which will exceed that of the sun, if it were brought down into your houses. So, if that is the reward for the parents, what do you think is the reward for the person who acts upon it himself?"



The most important consideration regarding the Qur'an is that Allah states in the Book that it is not of human origin; it consists of the actual pre-eternal, uncreated speech of Allah Himself. As such, no other book exists which carries the degree of perfection and balance in its words. Even the most disinterested observer cannot fail to be impressed upon hearing the Qur'an recited. It is of surpassing beauty, melody and majesty.

Another important point about the Qur'an is that within the first seven lines, virtually all of the sounds that occur in Arabic are uttered. One of these letters is *ghayn* which, when uttered, causes a kind of growling, guttural sound in the back of the throat. Each letter sets off a vibratory pattern that travels in a specific direction, lasts a specific duration, and produces specific physical, mental and spiritual effects. The sound of the letter *ghayn* (and also *kha*, *'ayn*, and others) is usually not made in the English language. This means that the effects associated with such letters are not felt unless one recites the Arabic. It is a bit curious that most of the sounds that occur in Arabic and not in English are associated with the sounds of choking in English!

Even more important, the various combinations of vowels and consonants combine to stimulate and disperse the divine attributes throughout the body of the reciter in perfect measure. One of the attributes is *al-Ghafur* (the forgiver), which contains the letter *ghayn*. One who never recites this letter is deprived of the full measure of forgiveness in his or her own soul.



There are three basic vowel sounds in Arabic: the letters *alif*, *waw* and *ya'*.

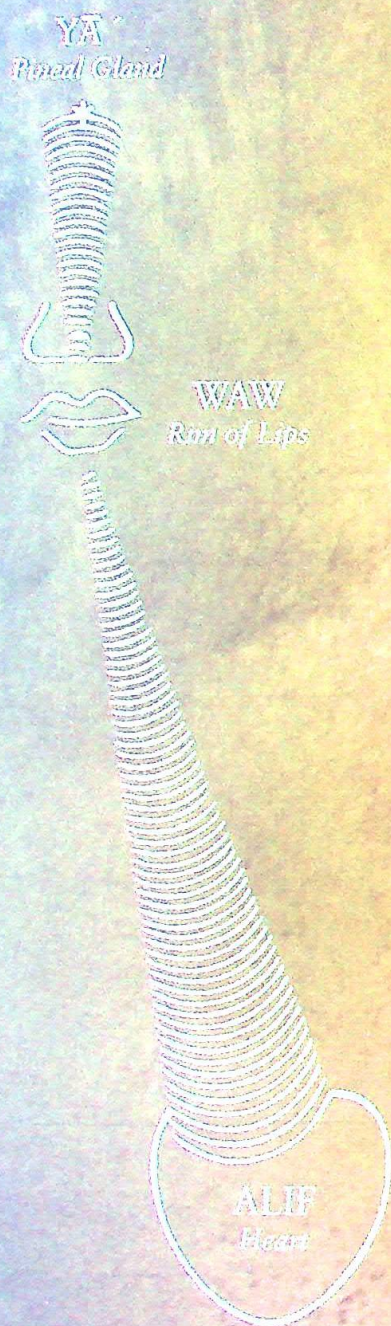
Name of Vowel Sound	Pronunciation	Symbol
Alif	a as in father	ا
Ya'	i as in machine	ي
Waw	u as in you	و

All languages utilise these three basic long vowel sounds, and they can be thought of as universal harmonic constants, uttered not only by humans but also by every being in Creation. Once one has become attuned to these sounds, one can listen in on the conversations of all of nature!

The vibrations of these three sounds have different effects. The long vowel sound of *ā* travels downward and stimulates the heart, the repository of divine attributes. The long *ī* travels upward and stimulates the pineal gland, which is not fully understood by Western science but is felt to be responsible for the activation of the life forces. And the long sound of *ū* resonates on the outer rim of the pursed lips, and intermingles with the *idhn* of Allah, as His permission for our lives unites with our inhaled and exhaled breaths.

These sounds are not particularly sung or spoken, but are expressed in a special recitation, which is achieved correctly after some time of reading from the Qur'an. In time, these sounds resonate their essence in the tone box of the soul. This may seem a vague manner of expressing such things but until and unless one experiences it, such descriptions must suffice.

In addition to the foregoing considerations of sound and breath, the Qur'an contains yet another unique feature that transforms it into a full set of breathing practices.



The illustration shows the point of origin and direction of travel of the vibratory tones associated with each vowel sound.



Appearing as punctuation marks in most editions of the Holy Qur'an (although not in editions for native Arabic speakers, who already know them) are various marks in the text. One set of these markings is called *waqf*, which means 'pause' and indicates where the reciter must stop and take a full breath. The main *waqf* mark is a small circle, as shown by an arrow in the following line:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

As an example, in Surat al-Fatihah, which opens the Qur'an, there are seven of these marks placed after each of the seven *ayats*, or verses. One who is reciting at the elementary stages must stop whenever coming to this mark. This pause forces each line to be of a specified length, which is the same length as it appeared in the original form revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.s.).

However, realising that some persons have a greater capacity than others, Allah has allowed several forms of recitation of the Qur'an, each appropriate to a different capacity for breath and spiritual evolution. Thus, additional marks occur, allowing several of the *ayats* to be recited without the main pauses. Thus, the length of time of recitation may be as short as a few seconds or as long as two minutes.

The correct seven main breath pauses for the opening *surah* are reproduced in the accompanying illustration. Anyone who is learning the Qur'an does so by initially following these main breath pauses.

The signs inside the circles indicate the number of the *ayat*. The marks above the circles designate which of the stops are compulsory to obey and which can be gone past. The sign of *lam-alif* (ل) means that to stop is optional. When encountering this sign, one may continue on past all *lam-alifs* until one arrives at the sign of *tā* (ط), which marks the compulsory stop for the second level of reciting. Another mode of reciting allows going past the *tā* as well, stopping only when the sign of *āyn* (ع) appears over the circle. Thus, one may recite the entire Surat al-Fatihah using seven

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ  
 الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ  
 الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ  
 مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ  
 إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ  
 اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ  
 صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ  
 عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ



breaths, three breaths, or one breath. In some of the *ayats*, these breath pauses allow for recitations lasting almost two full minutes. It is indeed astonishing to hear the Qur'an recited in this manner.

Furthermore, there are additional levels of recitation which involve prolonging the breaths and focusing upon certain vowels and consonants. One would of necessity require years to attain complete mastery of the modes of reciting the Holy Qur'an. Persons attaining this mastery are called *qari*, and have committed the entire Qur'an to memory by this stage.

For the Sufi aspirant, the first requirement is knowledge of the correct modes of reciting the verses of the Holy Qur'an. The ascensions of ecstasy produced thereby can only be imagined. There are more than a few reports of Shaykhs expiring while engaged in listening to a recitation of, or themselves reciting, the Holy Qur'an. Shaykh Bayazid Bistami (r.a.) once noted that it was the greatest mystery to him that the person who recited the call to prayer did not die from it.

Obviously, not every person, particularly a novice, can achieve full recitation of the Qur'an within a short time. In order to accelerate the effects of the Qur'an – in its effects upon body, mind and soul – the Sufis resort to the use of the divine names, which condense and compress the effects of a longer recitation into a brief space.

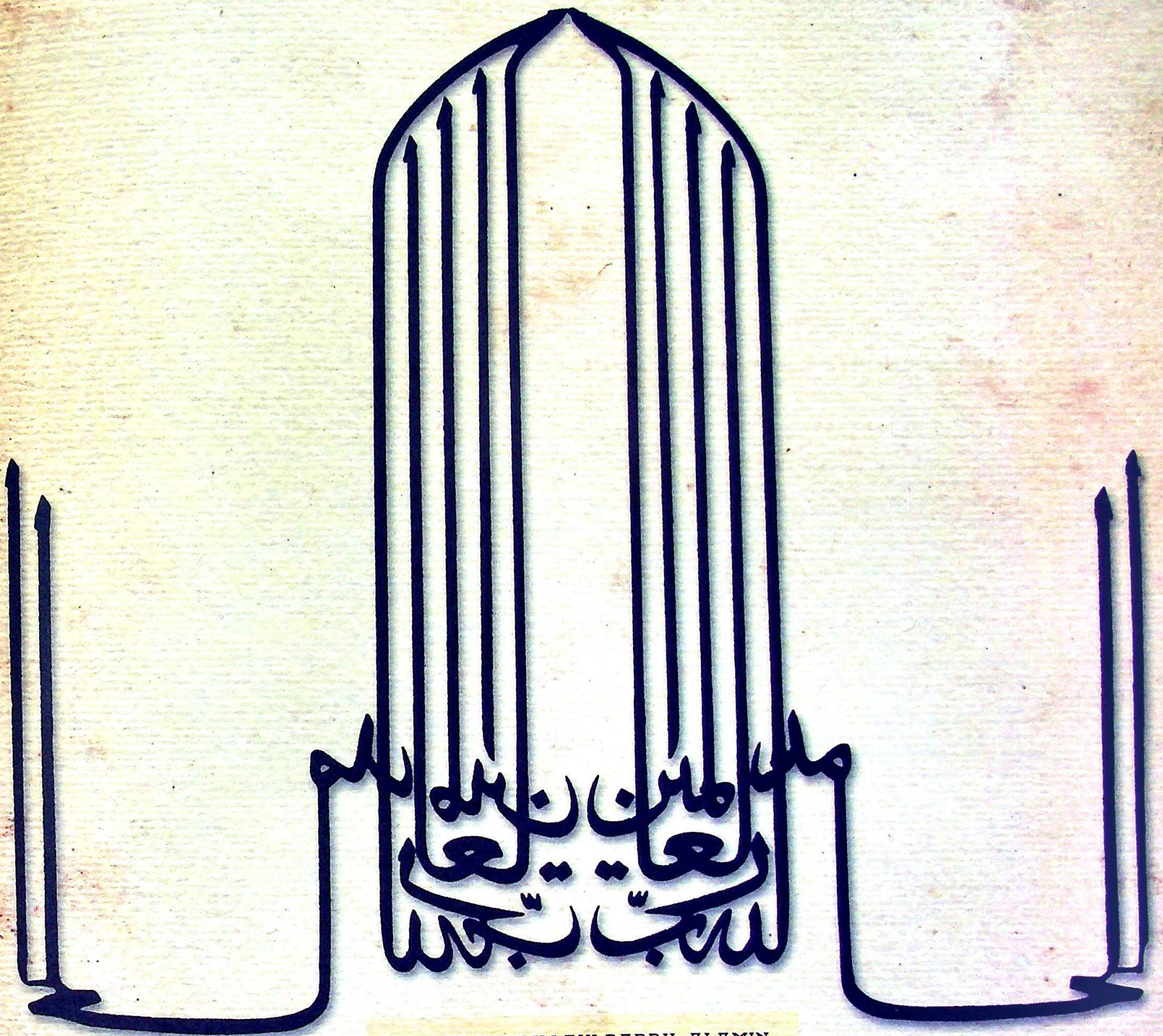
It is here that we step off into the realm of the divine realities, where only true and great faith will sustain one.



*'The Universe of the Breath' excerpted from The Book of Sufi Healing by Shaykh Hakim Moinuddin Chishti. Published by Inner Traditions, Rochester, Vermont 05767, USA. Used with permission.*







ALHAMDU LILLAHİ RABBİL-ALAMİN

I SUBMIT MYSELF  
TO HIM WHO HAS  
CREATED THE  
WORLD



MUZAFFAR ALI'S  
*Jahan-e-Khusrau*  
The Realm of the Heart

2001...

Kashmir has inspired in me the urge to understand mystical music... unravel the mysteries of Nature and their relationship to art and the human soul. The creation of the circle of time from sunrise to sunrise, from season to season, was found in the timeless melodies of the *makaams*, the basis for the 'Sufiana Kalaam' of Kashmir.

One stopped judging music for its sensual quality to arouse and attract, and one began to find a connection within, like the human breath that we cannot live without and take for granted. The singing of the birds, the rippling of the streams, the blowing of the wind, the falling of the snow... all became part of this meditative activity.

Like meditation, *Sufiana Kalaam* doesn't come easy, but still you feel like a silent spectator watching an enormous ocean...

With this inspiration, *Jahan e Khusrau* acquired special meaning and has always tried to give a feel of this kind of music to attract lovers who would then go deeper into this journey...

— Muzaffar Ali





## Secrets of the Divine

A TRIBUTE TO KELANAQAH-E-NIAZIA  
SELECTED AND COMPOSED BY MUZAFFAR ALI  
IN THE VOICE OF ZILA KHAN



Kaj Kulaah

## THE TILTED CAP

PERSIAN POETRY OF AMIR KHUSRAU  
WITH ENGLISH TRANSLATION  
IN THE VOICE OF  
SHAFQAT ALI KHAN & MURAD ALI

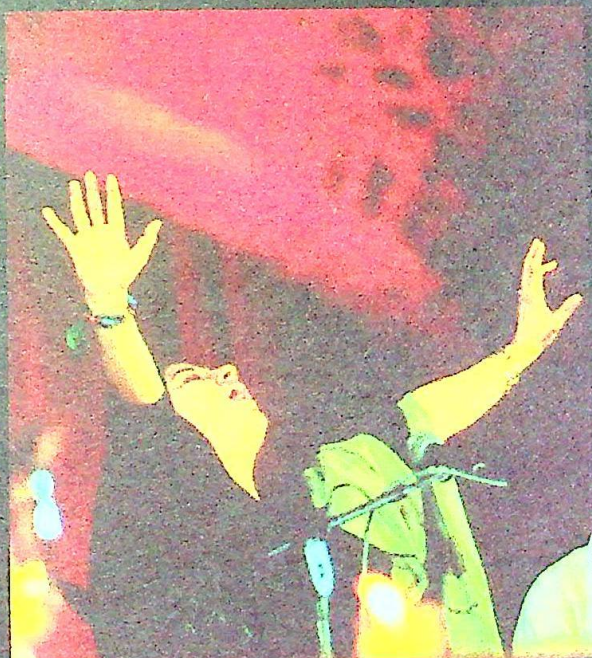
## Rū e Ali

the face of Ali  
SELECTED AND COMPOSED BY MUZAFFAR ALI  
IN THE VOICE OF ABIDA PARVEEN

## NEW RELEASES

## Shubha Mudgal

IN JAHAN-E-KHUSRAU 2002 & 2004  
2ND & 4TH INTERNATIONAL SU MUSIC FESTIVAL, DELHI



## Breathe into Me

A FILM BY MUZAFFAR ALI

## Rumi in the Land of Khusrau

a film by Muzaffar Ali

MUZAFFAR ALI'S NAZR E SALIM CHISHTI  
DESIGNED AND DIRECTED BY MUZAFFAR ALI

MUZAFFAR ALI'S JAHAN E ISHQ  
DESIGNED AND DIRECTED BY MUZAFFAR ALI



## Karwan e Rumi

CONCEIVED AND DIRECTED BY MUZAFFAR ALI





*The Folk*  
*music of Kashmir*



‘MUSIC IS BORN IN BENGAL, IT IS AT THE PRIME OF ITS YOUTH IN THE Punjab, and by the time it enters the Vale of Kashmir it is dead.’ This is what people had to say about the music of Kashmir for quite a long time. On the very face of it, this observation could not be correct, for music is neither born nor does it die. Music has always grown in a country in relation to its environment, mainly ecological and political.

The music of Kashmir, as we hear it today, is the result of a curious admixture of many influences under different rules. In music, too, Kashmir had to assimilate various foreign characteristics and has surely lost, in this process, some of its intricate and subtle classical details. Its classical music, known as *Sufiana Kalam*, was never written for want of an exact notation, which the Indian classical music, too, does not yet possess. It has, therefore, been handed down from man to man. This too has made our music suffer. But some of its broad details and original characteristics are still retained, which tempt a deeper study into it. References to the music of Kashmir date back to 200 BC. In *Rajataragini*, which is a chronicle of the kings of Kashmir over a period of about 2000 years, we read of Maharaja Jalok who was a great patron of music and had hundreds of musicians at his court. Maharaja Lalita Ditiya, who came a thousand years later, is reputed to have had at his court Indra Prabha, the most celebrated woman dancer of ancient times. Other ruling princes like Harash Dev and Jai Dev not only extended their patronage to music but were themselves talented musicians.

In the Muslim era, particularly during the time of the Sultans, the music of Kashmir not only thrived, but also imbibed some influences from Iran, Arabia, Samarkand and Tashkand. Sultan Zain-ul-Abdin, the most celebrated of the rulers, was himself a talented vocalist. Every year he held a festival of music in which eminent musicians from Yarkand, Tashkand, Punjab and Delhi were invited to participate. It is said that on one of these occasions, an outside musician presented to the Sultan *Sangeet Chudamani* – one of the greatest authentic treatises on music. *Santoor*, the most popular of the Kashmiri instruments, is said to

have been introduced in his reign. Soon after this great king came Sultan Hasan Shah who, it is claimed, had as many as 1022 musicians at his court. It is also said that once he invited six Karnatik musicians to popularise some of their *ragas* in Kashmir. Sultan Hasan Shah has definitely done a great service to music. It was in his time that Kashmiri music was consolidated and some books written on it. Unfortunately, none of those treatises are to be traced at present. But musicians and talented artists like Soom Bhat, Shridhar Bhat, Mulla Ahmed, Abdul Qadir, Mulla Jamil, Bhalol, Arnimal and Ajodhya Bhat are still known for their extraordinary work and talent in music.

This brings us to 1578 of the Chak Dynasty rule in Kashmir. Yusuf Shah Chak is famous for having shared this enthusiasm for Kashmiri music. With him is connected the most romantic and one of the most important figures of Kashmir – Habba Khatoon – poet, musician, queen and mystic.

With the downfall of the Chak Dynasty, the music of Kashmir no longer enjoyed royal patronage and received a setback. Kashmir lost its freedom. It became enslaved and gradually forgot its great heritage in art and culture. But its music was kept alive by the genius and interest of individuals. It was during this period that the music of Kashmir developed a predominant shriek, the heave, which was either reflected in a feeling of love or portrayed a plaintive, woeful and melancholic mood. Sometimes it chose to express helplessness and resignation to fate. This probably gave rise to the feeling that music finally finds its graveyard in Kashmir. But the music of Kashmir has orthodoxly retained its melody and has shown a craze for musical rhyme and ever-recurring refrains rich in alliterations and assonances. Much of this, however, has been pure, spontaneous and unsophisticated in approach.

*Chakkari*, which is easily the most popular form of the folk music of Kashmir, invariably sings songs of the unlettered woman and finds a sure echo for her emotions. This probably is one of the reasons that a major portion of the poems is sung in this music by a woman as the lover. This is equally true of Hindi poetry. With the passage of



time, these songs have not failed to escape the Persian influence but have, at the same time, picked up a poignant and direct appeal. The type of rhythm which *Chakkari* has retained all along has, in the course of time, found passionate, sensuous and ornate songs to perform. This, at a later stage, gave place to devotional and religious fervour in its thought content. Modern musical literature is rich in incantations and imagery, and poses the eternal longing of the human soul. Most of its typical lyrics, however, have been brief and musical, abounding in rhymes and assonances.

Probably like all other folk music, *Chakkari* has a very simple and cheap orchestra to accompany it. Generally a *ghara* (pitcher) with *ghungroos*, a *sarangi* (cruder than its Indian equivalent) and a *tumbaknari* (an earthen drum) form its entire orchestra. The harmonium, too, has its place but it is fast vanishing and the *rabab* has stepped in. All the instruments are primarily musical and manifest primitive elements in them. The *ghara*, it seems, has been associated with this music from the earliest time. In *Rajtarangini* too, a reference is made to musicians who played on musical instruments of clay, beating them with their hands. Technically speaking, the *ghara* plays a vital role in bringing out the real pattern of rhythm performed in this form of music. The doubling of *laya*, which follows in between every verse in the form of a musical interlude known as the *jawab*, can best be achieved with the help of the *ghara*. The *tumbaknari* is a *surahi*-shaped earthen drum with its bottom chopped off and over which dry sheepskin is pasted. It does the drumming part of the music and helps in emphasising the requisite scintillation in *Chakkari*. No special technique is needed to make this instrument. Indeed, it is a speciality of the Kashmir potter who includes, among other clay utensils supplied by him to any marriage party, a few *tumbaknaris*. The instrument known as the *tumbak* which is used in the Middle East countries at present, seems to be based on the same principle. But they have improved it. Instead of pasting the dry skin at the bottom of the instrument, it is adjusted over it on a round wooden frame. In this case it can be tuned to the required pitch and it gives out a softer reproduction.

I have, however, found that instead of using a clay body, if the skin is pasted over a dried pumpkin, the reproduction is very pleasant and has no problems of getting detuned as at present.

*Sarangi-sarang*, as we call it, is the only bow instrument used in *Chakkari*. In shape and principle it is the Indian *sarangi* in miniature. It has a limited range. Only one octave can, at best, be played upon the instrument, which suits the folk music of Kashmir because most of these tunes do not go beyond one octave. Actually, the typical folk tunes are called *Tribandi* – *tri* meaning three and *bandi* meaning notes. The tunes are played in the natural order of the notes and are invariably based on *Bilwal Thata*. However, the range of the instrument can be extended by dividing the notes on the two main strings of the instrument known as the *bum* and the *jila*.

*Rabab*, a pluck instrument, came into our music from Afghanistan about 400 years ago. It has fitted in so well with the pattern of the music that it is now an integral part of it. The Indian *sarod*, which has borrowed a part of its *baaj* (style) from the *rabab*, would be a welcome improvement for that would give greater cadence to the timbre of the instrument. But since its technique of playing is slightly different from that of the *rabab*, it will take time.





*Santoor*, though essentially an instrument of the Kashmiri classical music known as *Sufiana Kalam*, also deserves to be mentioned. The Persians still use an instrument called *qanun*, much like that of the same name found in India – a kind of dulcimer strung with gut or wire strings and played upon by plectra fastened to the fingers of the performers. That is a development of the *kathayani-vina* or *satatantri* (hundred-stringed) *vina*, as it was formerly called. The Persian *qanun*, the prototype of the European mediaeval psaltery, afterwards became the *santir* which has strings of wire instead of gut and is played with two sticks, and in the West it actually took the form of the dulcimer. In Vedic India, too, a very wide variety of musical instruments was in use. Among those mentioned is the stringed instrument known as the *vana*. The *vana* is a lute of a hundred strings.

*Santoor* also derives its name from the Persian equivalent – *san* meaning hundred and *tur* meaning strings. In several details it resembles the *satatantri* or the *kathayani-vina* which became the *santir*. *Santoor*, therefore, has a definite classical origin.





In the Pathan rule, fancy was taken to a boy, known as the *bucha*, who tried to add further ornamentation to the verses sung in *Chakkari Jawab*, the musical interlude, was the place where the male dancer, dressed as a female, entertained the audience with dance tricks. This, in the course of time, grew into another form of folk music known as *Bucha Naghma*. But soon after 1947, the unnatural element of a boy dancing to this music was rightly discouraged.

The Kashmir National Cultural Front, which was founded at the same time as the 1947 invasion of Kashmir, took the lead in mobilising almost all the talent of the Valley. In the music and dance section of the association, some very interesting and useful experiments were made for the first time to give to the music and dance of Kashmir its present day trends. Apart from the number of dance features, stage plays, wayside shows and the like, troupes of artistes went from village to village with a pilgrim's staff in hand, surveying their problems and presenting to the villagers clear lines of action in their folk dance and rhythm. The results were very encouraging and brought out once again the salient features of the folk music of Kashmir. Efforts were made to include in these, all types of the rich variety of the folk music of Kashmir.

The group dance of Kashmir, known as *Band-Jeshna*, has its deep-rooted tradition at Wathore – a village about eight miles from Kashmir. *Shahmai*, *dhol* and the *nagara* (much the same as the Indian *dholak*) form the orchestra for this type of dance music. With the entire village as audience, dance stories are enacted by these itinerant groups and invariably last the whole night. These artistes are essentially agriculturists, and dancing and singing is only a recreation with them. This is true about the entire folk talent of Kashmir.

Even the *Lari-shah*, the ballad narrator, who goes from door to door in the villages collecting rice, *shali* and sometimes a few coins, is not a professional artiste. He has a very crude instrument to add colour to his performance. About a dozen iron rings are thrown round an iron rod while he forces a circle around the rod with his right hand fingers, to give him a feeling of rhythm.

In *Gojar* music of Kashmir, which is probably of great solace to the shepherd high in the pastures, a flute is used as the only accompaniment. Beside the placid lake and by the side of murmuring streams and rich green verdure, the seeds of *Gojar* music seem to have grown and gone into their very marrow. One finds a pious appeal in their *Qanchi* and the *Bait* styles of music. The tunes are so penetrating that they find an echo in the heart.

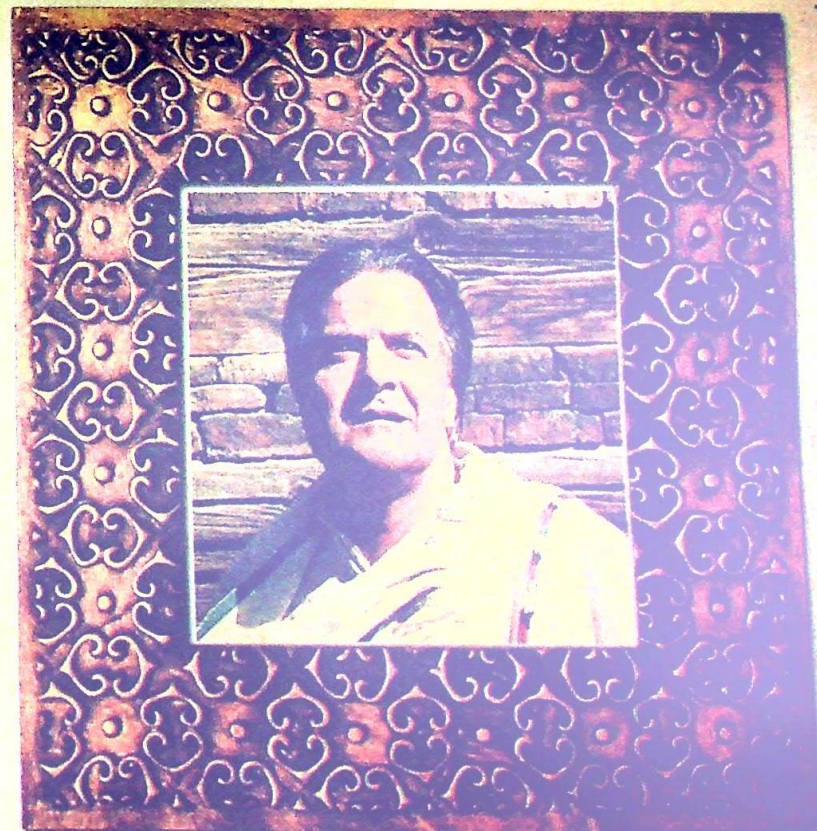
Among the other types of folk music of Kashmir, mention should also be made of *Rabab-Chorus* known as *Tumbuer-Naghma*, *Wanwun* and *Rove*. *Tumbuer-Naghma* is now fast dwindling into extinction but the *Wanwun* is still there. *Wanwun* and the *Rove* are essentially women's music and dance. Both among the Muslims and Hindus, the *Wanwun* forms a part and parcel of a marriage ceremony. Even though centuries have passed, it has not altered in the least. Every ritual of a marriage ceremony is preceded with a chant known as the *Wanwun-hur*. Among the Hindus, however, *Wanwun* forms an integral part of the *Vagnopavit* ceremony also. It is the earliest music of Kashmir. It is as old as the institution of marriage and has far-reaching anthropological significance. In many technical details, the Hindu *Wanwun* bears a very close resemblance to the *Alap* of Indian music. It is manifest in a slow drone tempo and each chant seems to be based on the *vilambit laya* (slow tempo) of *ek-tala*, which is a rhythm pattern of fourteen beats.

*Rove*, meaning the semicircle, is known as *Ruff* at present. Among the muslim women of Kashmir, *Ruff* is an important item of the festive programme on 'Id' and also in the month of 'Ramzan', the month of 'Rozas'. It is reported to have once been the most popular form of the group dances performed by Kashmiris. Alternate rows of men and women took part in this group dance in a semicircle while singing songs of love and joy.

Kashmir, thus, has a rich variety of folk music and dance. It is interesting to find that even in the villages in which no particular form of folk music is present, the villagers do at least own a few drums which they beat to music on all occasions, like marriage functions.

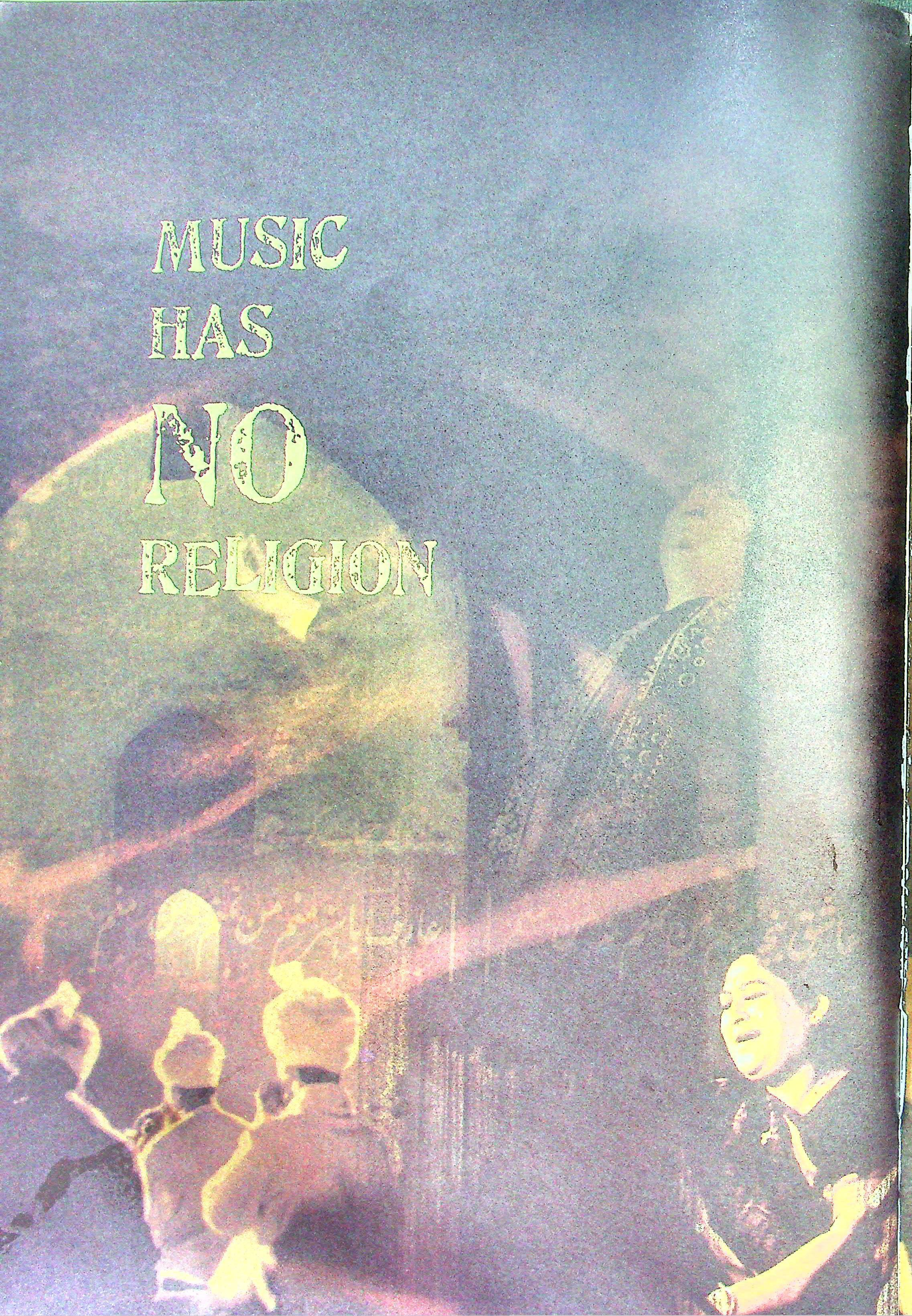


BY (LATE) MOHAN LAL AIMA, A DOYEN OF KASHMIRI MUSIC WHO WAS A SELF-TAUGHT MAN AS FAR AS MUSIC WAS CONCERNED. HE BECAME A FAMOUS MUSIC COMPOSER KNOWN FOR HIS FEEL OF THE LOCAL MUSIC TRADITION OF KASHMIR, AND WAS AMONG THE MOVING SPIRITS OF THE POST-1947 REVIVAL OF KASHMIRI MUSIC WHO LIFTED THE KASHMIRI 'CHAKKARI' FROM ITS PLEBEIAN MOORINGS AND GAVE IT POPULARITY AND RESPECTABILITY AMONG HIGH-BORN KASHMIRIS. THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF THE NEWLY ESTABLISHED RADIO STATION IN SRINAGAR, HE WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN BRINGING OUT 'SUFIANA MUSIC' FROM THE *DIWANKHANAS* OF THE ELITE AND TAKING IT TO THE HOMES OF THE COMMON PEOPLE. HE HAD A BEAUTIFUL VOICE AND MESMERISING PLAY ON THE MATKA. HE COMPOSED MUSIC FOR THE FIRST KASHMIRI FEATURE FILM *PAMPOSH* DURING THE FIFTIES AND AGAIN TWO OTHER FILMS, *MAENZ RAAT* AND *MAHJOOR*. HE SERVED RADIO KASHMIR AND FINALLY RETIRED AS DIRECTOR DOORDARSHAN, MUMBAI.





MUSIC  
HAS  
NO  
RELIGION





“MUSIC HAS NO RELIGION – LIKE WATER, AIR AND FIRE – AND IT CONNECTS the world, rather than divide,” declared Salman Ahmad, founder of the Sufi-rock band of Pakistani musicians. He denounced the culture of intolerance and asserted that his music has been enriched because he has worked with renowned musicians throughout the world. A devotee of the Islamic mystical tradition of Sufism, Salman believes in humanity’s oneness with the divine, and has furthered that vision in his lyrics by making the ‘Junoon’ band a voice for peace and international understanding. Like the Sufi music patronised by Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti who founded the Chistiyya order in Ajmer, Junoon invokes the necessary ideological support to Salman’s musical mission to bring about emotional integration of people worldwide.

Chisti’s teachings emphasised tolerance and respect for religious differences. He interpreted religions and customs in terms of human service and exhorted his disciples ‘to develop river-like generosity, sun-like affection and earth-like hospitality’.

Salman Ahmad does not subscribe to the notion of ‘art for art’s sake’. The Junoon group recently performed at the prestigious Nobel Ceremony in Oslo, in honour of the laureates of this year’s Nobel Peace Prize – Al Gore, former US Vice President and Rajendra Pachauri, Chairman of the UN international climate panel. The acoustic Sufi music concert was dedicated to the lawyers’ movement in Pakistan, the restoration of the Supreme Court judges and

the independence of the judiciary. It was yet another landmark in support of Pakistan’s civil society, media, students and rights activists who heroically protested against the government’s illegal action in imposing emergency in Pakistan. Like the western rock stars – Sting, George Clooney, Brad Pitt, Bono and Bob Geldof among others, who are supporting worthy campaigns – against poverty, disease, vanishing rainforests – Junoon music is an antidote to religious extremism and terrorism. Salman Ahmad was designated a UN Special Representative for HIV Aids.

Junoon’s collaborative concerts include a piece composed by Yoshikazu Fukumora for the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra titled ‘Tribute to Hong Kong’, and duets with guitarist Charley Byrd, violinist Igor Frolov, soprano Glenda Simpson, guitarist Barry Mason and cellist Matthew Barley. He has been visiting professor at the universities of Yorkshire, Washington, North Eastern and New Mexico.

Junoon imparts a thrilling passion to its live performances, combining a blend of powerful arena rock with the spiritual tranquility of Sufi poetry. Founded in 1990 by guitarist-songwriter-medical doctor Salman Ahmad, the band took both Pakistan and India by storm in 1998 with the hit single ‘Sayonee’. It was a part of the band’s tremendously successful fourth studio album ‘Azadi’ (freedom). The band’s hybrid Sufi music is blended with some of the world’s most innovative rock ‘n’ roll tunes and carries a powerful message of peace and tolerance by sharing stage with bands such as Oasis and Pearl Jam.

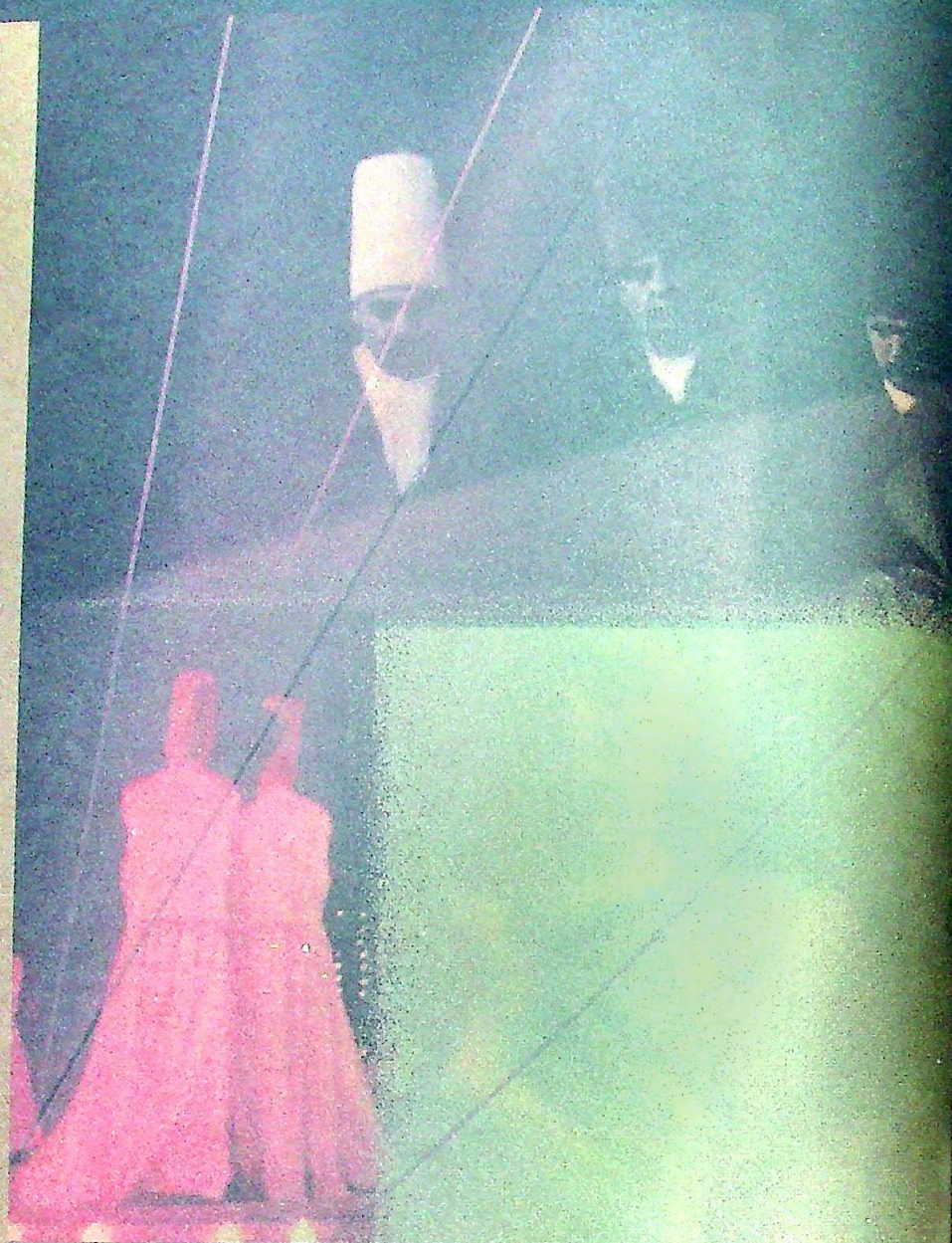




The deepest of emotions are invoked by language. The word *junoon* means 'obsessive, passion' in Urdu, an Indian language born between the Ganges and Jamuna Rivers near Delhi. Its multicultural tradition developed side by side with the growth of Sufism that resulted from the literary products of earlier varieties of dialects, variously known as Gujari and Hindavi. It was also called Dakhami (southern), because in the sixteenth century Urdu literature, inspired by Sufi notions, developed in the courts of the Golconda and Bijapur rulers in the Deccan. Aurangabad became the centre of Urdu literary activities in the late seventeenth century and, with the migration of scholars from Delhi in the eighteenth century, Lucknow too became an important centre of Sufi culture.

The multicultural and pluralist culture of India, which became a catalyst for the interaction between the traditional and modern music of today, may be credited to a number of male and female Bhakti saints – Mahavira, Kabir, Chisti, Nanak and Mirabai among others – poets and musicians from all walks of life and religions. With the advent of the *Vedanta* (end of the *Vedas*), also called the *Upanishads*, during the tenth and eleventh centuries, the intellectual basis for the Bhakti (devotion) movement was mainly provided by the great Hindu theologian and philosopher, Ramanuja. Several, often contradictory, schools of thought arose, representing an unprecedented diversity in beliefs spanning monotheism, polytheism and atheism. In the *Nyaya-Sutras*, the overwhelming focus is on rational and scientific thinking and analysis that emphasises human understanding as natural phenomena and physical processes occurring in nature.

However, it was not until Khwaja Mo'inuddin Chisti (AD 1141–1230) arrived in India and promoted music and *sama* in centres called *khanqah*, that a new composite culture of syncretism began to develop. Chisti skilfully combined the notions of Bhakti devotion with Sufi mysticism in order fully to assimilate India's multicultural plurality. These cultural centres gradually developed into *gharanas* – a system of social organisation in which groups of musicians are linked by lineage and/or apprenticeship



and adhere to a particular musical style. The *gharanas* also served as the cradle of Indian classical music. The *phirai* or 'free run' of the classical music, *Raag*, was devised and sung for the first time by Ustad Bade Mohammad Khan at the Gwalior *gharana*. Another stalwart, Ustad Mubarak Ali Khan, is credited with the invention of *dohri* or *dugun ki phirai*.

The tradition of classical music and its creative individuality is very much alive in the numerous *gharanas* flourishing in many parts of north India. Abdul Karim Khan created the Kirana *gharana*, and his style later came to be known as the Indore *gharana*. Alladiya Khan founded the Atrauli-Jaipur *gharana* that has his own musical style. Omkarnath Thakur, Vinayak Rao Patwardhan and D. V. Paluskar – each has an entirely different style of singing even though they all hail from the same Gwalior *gharana*. Similarly, Bade Gulam Ali Khan gave a new dimension to the Patiala *gharana* while Ameer Khan provided a completely new colour and character to the Kirana *gharana*. The other best-known *gharanas* of vocal



and instrumental music are located at Gwalior, Agra, Jaipur, Rampur, Bhendi Bazar, Banaras, Bishnupur Kasur, Mewati, Sham Chourasi, Delhi and the Sufiana *gharana*, Kashmir. Thus the shared values of the *gurukul* concept of music became closely interwoven with *gharana* musical innovations, creating a common culture in the field of vocal and instrumental music.

The interfaith lyrics Guru Nanak Dev (1469–1539) composed were based on both his Hindu and Muslim mentors – Kabir, Namdev, Ravidas and Sheikh Farid. Sikh tradition has it that at the age of thirty, Nanak Dev would say no more than repeat: “There is no Hindu; there is no Muslim.” Accompanied by Mardana, a Muslim *rabab* player and another colleague Bala, a Hindu, Nanak travelled extensively in India and abroad as far as Mecca and Baghdad.

Today, the great *sitar* player Ravi Shankar embodies this marvellous tradition. He was born into a Hindu Brahmin family in Bangladesh and studied under Allaudin Khan (1862–1972), the founder of the Maihar *gharana* of Indian classical music. Ravi Shankar married the daughter of his *guru*, the sister of Ali Akbar Khan, a famous player of *sarod*. The Indian *sitar* is said to have been invented by Amir Khusrau (1253–1325), a devotee of the Chistia order, after the Persian ‘*setar*’, from the *saz* group of musical instruments. The international cultural connotation is also evident from the Persian musical ensemble, *rabab*, *sarod*, *sarangi* and *tabla*, which became an integral part of South Asian musical instruments.

In Bangladesh, Ravi Shankar was inspired by the Baul tradition that is a unique heritage of Bengali folk music. Bauls are wandering minstrels and itinerant singers who do not belong to any religious denomination. The lonely Baul roams places, trying endlessly to find his identity through music, devotion and love. Their songs invoke traditions that can be interpreted as a revolt against the conventions and bindings of established religions. They believe the ‘spirit’ does not reside in an unknown heaven but instead can be traced within us through love and compassion for one another.

Aware of the growing threat of Islamic fundamentalism to the Bengali secular folk and classical music, Ravi Shankar, together with his friend Paul Harrison, organised ‘The Concert for Bangladesh’ at the United Nations headquarters in 1971. He also played with Yehudi Menuhin and attempted to synchronise South Asian and Western music, as Salman’s band Junoon is doing at present alongside international artists like Alicia Keys, Melissa Etheridge and Annie Lennox.



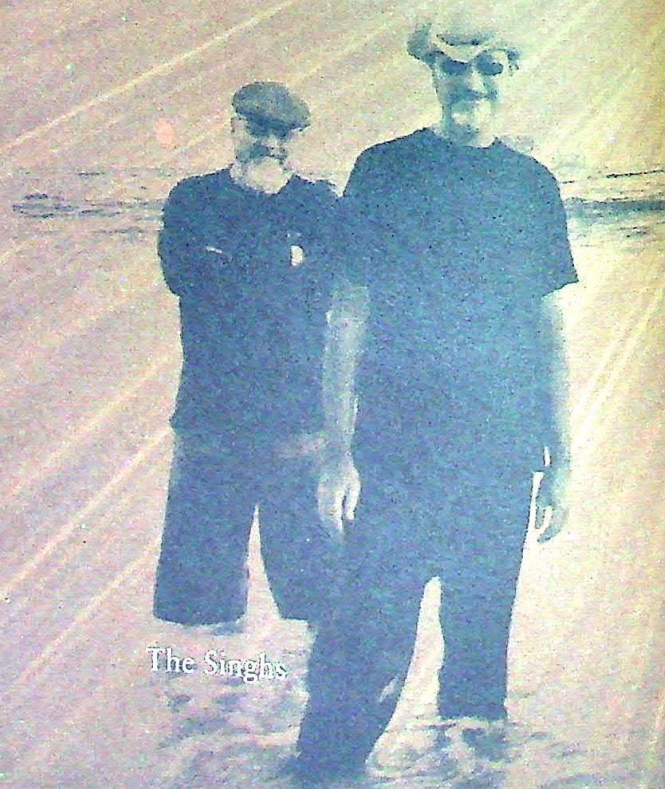
Supporters of the Taliban and other Islamic extremist groups consider music to be their main enemy. They have attacked music-related shops and cultural institutions. DVD and CD shops were banned and became the targets of hardcore militants' homemade bombs. They championed General Zia-ul-Haq's Islamist legacy of fundamentalism in Pakistan. The military dictator tried his best to suffocate Pakistan's traditional Sufi culture by emulating Saudi Arabia's Wahhabi Islam. He banned all forms of cultural activities including figurative painting, singing, dancing and music, categorising them as blasphemous. The extremity of his Islamic fanaticism is shown by his ban, in Pakistan on the staging of the all-time classic 'Heer Ranjha' by the renowned freedom fighter and theatre personality, Sheila Bhatia and her troupe. The ban was on the ground that 'Islam does not permit a show where Heer would be enacted by a woman.'

Zia-ul-Haq behaved in the fanatical tradition of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb who executed his own brother Dara Shikoh, a disciple of the Qadiri Sufis, for upholding India's multicultural civilisation. Dara Shikoh had worked out correlations between Sufi and *Upanishad* cosmologies in his treatise *Majma al-Bahrain*. He also translated into Persian the *Bhagavad Gita* and other Hindu scriptures. As a result, in the seventeenth century, the Muslim elite virtually identified the *Vedanta* with Sufism – a culture based on the ethical teachings common to all religions, which Akbar the Great had attempted to promote with the promulgation of a new religion, Din-Ilahi, in 1581.

The most effective harbingers of sanity today are the secular artists increasingly stepping forward to uphold multicultural ideals and regional cooperation. This was demonstrated in 2006 by forty performing artists from the eight SAARC countries who put up a spectacular show at UNESCO House in Paris on the theme, 'Oral and Intangible Heritage of South Asia'. India's foremost *ghatam* player, Vikku Vinayakaram and the famous Sufi singer from Pakistan, Saeen Zohoor were clamorously applauded. Zohoor learnt *kalams* of poets like Bulleh Shah and lyrics of Rumi from his *guru*, the Indian Sufi

Ustad Raunka Ali of Patiala. Born and raised in Okara, a village, Zohoor became a 'street singer' performing for decades at Sufi *dargahs*, shrines and festivals in Pakistan and India. The international community discovered him in 1989 when he performed his first concert on stage, and he is now world-famous.

Several groups in the genre of Sufi-rock music have sprung up in South Asia. Among them is Falu, a Bombay-born singer whose formidable vocal style complements a mix of Indian classical and alt-rock, and Jeet's band of musicians called Singh, which combines rock with Indian music. The band of Pakistani singers Abrar-ul-Huq was cheered and applauded by young people at Trafalgar Square in London as he sang to a massive crowd. "Songs about broken hearts and lovers lost are moving across the borders of India and Pakistan and taking the edge off the two nations' bitter history of three wars and a continuing nuclear stand-off," wrote Swati Gauri Sharma. "The modern day blend of Hindi and Urdu spoken in both countries, and songs sung by Pakistani artists and listened to by millions of Indians



The Singhs



and Pakistanis, have connected the two countries in a way they have never been able to before. The younger Indian generation's love of Pakistani bands has done what politicians have failed in reducing tension between the two countries."

As if it were a prelude to the shape of things to come, more than a million people participated on the eve of Pakistan's recent general elections in the commemoration of the anniversary of a Sufi saint from the Punjab at the village of Pakpattan. Waleed Ziad, a Pakistani economist who attended the feast, described the pageantry of dance, poetry, music and prayer. He noted that religious life in Pakistan has traditionally been synonymous with the gentle spirituality of Sufi mysticism, the traditional pluralistic core of Islam. Even in remote rural areas, spiritual life centres not on doctrinaire seminaries but on Sufi shrines. Recreation revolves around ostentatious wedding parties, Hollywood, Bollywood, Lollywood and Pollywood in the North West Frontier Province.

'Peshawar Spring' is how the people of NWFP jubilantly called the landslide victory of the secular and liberal Awami National Party, founded by Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan. "We Pushtuns are the children of Badshah Khan's progressive thoughts and ideals," declared Asfandiyar Wali Khan, a grandson of 'Frontier Gandhi,' as thousands of people took to the streets and bazaars, dancing the Punjabi *bhangra* and playing local Pashtun folk music. Thousands of bus drivers once again slipped cassettes or CDs into the stereos of their over-decorated vehicles. "Now that I have music, I love my job again," one of the local drivers was reported as saying. "I can breathe once more."

Indeed, fundamentalist and archaic politicians are barking up the wrong tree. Never ever has any obstruction or suppression of culture stopped the arts and music from transcending national boundaries. Nor is there any question of this happening in a globalised world of new technologies, the market economy, individualism, diversity, pluralism and mobility – the markers of twenty-first century life.



By Madanjeet Singh, Goodwill Ambassador for UNESCO and Founder, South Asia Foundation.





## Key Concepts in the Practice of Sufism Vol. 1 & 2

Author: M. Fethullah Gülen

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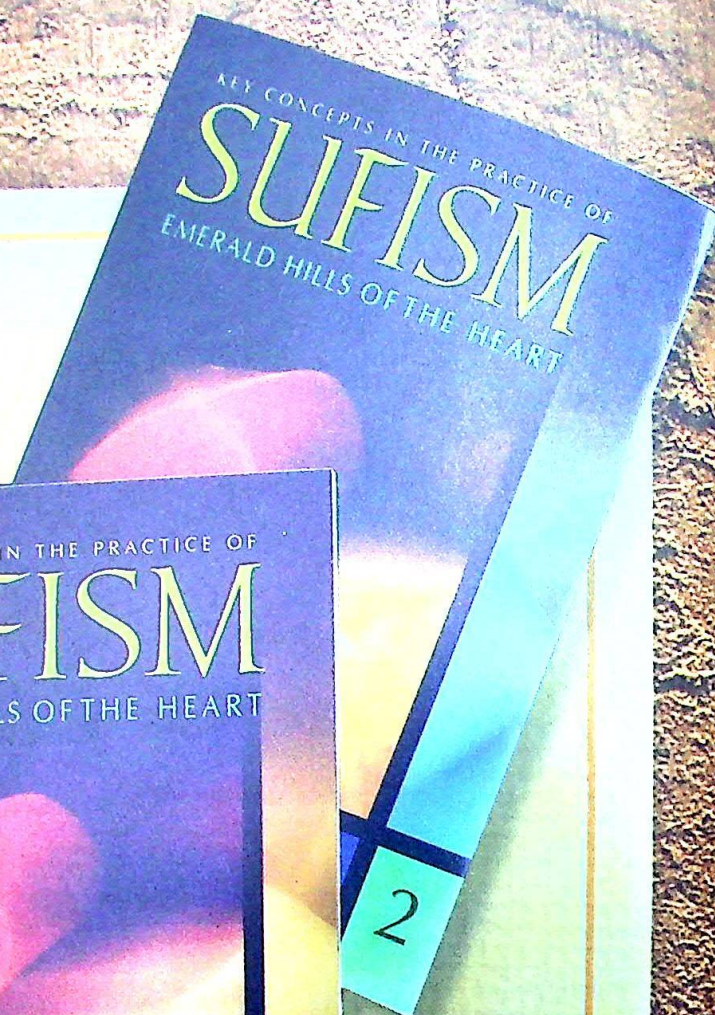
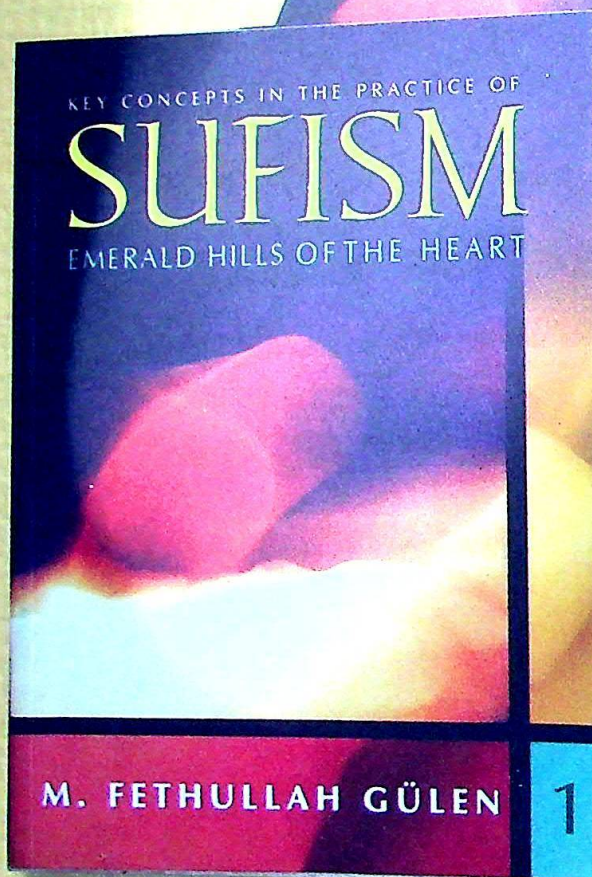
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What enriches a book is its author. For, as it is well known, a book is, in a sense, the fruit of all the intellectual and spiritual throes and agonies of its author.

The author, Fethullah Gülen, also called Hodjaefendi, is a well known and respected Turkish scholar, spiritual leader, educator and social reformer. He is also acknowledged by intellectuals and academics, either tacitly or explicitly, as being one of the most eminent scholars, thinkers and Sûfis. It's not surprising and one understands that Gülen's vision of love, tolerance and understanding has a strong Sufi background – copiously illustrated in this and all of his former works. He belongs to the land of the soul – Turkey, which is also the land of Rumi. In this context, Rev. Canon Georges Marovitch, Spokesman of the Vatican in Istanbul says, “Hodjaefendi is like a Rûmî model of our era. He invites everyone without discriminating against anyone. His door is open to everyone. He is re-named as Modern-Day Rûmî.” The world intelligentsia now discovers him.

Gülen wrote the first of this series of articles under a column titled ‘On the Emerald Hills of the Heart’ in *Sizinti* Magazine in October 1990 and ‘Hâl and Maqâm’ was the title of his first article. When I read it for the first time, I was highly impressed and waited for the next issue impatiently. The articles became a book, *Emerald Hills of the Heart* that was translated into English and named *Key Concepts of Sufism*. At present, the fourth volume of the series in Turkish and the third of the series in English have been published by the same publisher.

It seems Gülen has a melting pot of heart and mind in which all the fundamentals, the key concepts and traditions of Sufism – defined by him as the spiritual side of Islam and a form of self-purification



leading to the inner dimension of Islamic rituals, a deeper understanding of the divine acts, a greater knowledge and love of the Divine, and the path of the continual process of spiritual development – have been melted, refined and united, and then they have been cooled and mummified with a comprehensive view and embracing approach.

Therefore, the author invites readers to take a walk in 'the emerald hills of the heart' rather than read his exceptional books only for an intellectual *acquis*. In a consequence of that, spiritual practice (praxis) and action are, for Gülen, more important than theory, philosophy and ritual.

The author intends to re-build the foundations of Sufism and offers a new concept-based study, in a sense, a kind of a comprehensive dictionary or encyclopedia of the key concepts of Sufism by refining and raising it from where it is limited and degraded to some specific terms like 'Anal-Haq, Wahdat-i Wujûd' or some spiritless rituals. The intention is to seek a true and deeper understanding of Sufism and its dynamics.

Gülen's informative analysis intends to analyse the ontological and epistemological views of Sufis on existence, and to refine and crystallise Sufism. Thus, he renews (*tajdid*) Sufism by itself and its fundamentals and traditions, from the life of the Prophet to modern times. In all the volumes, he refers mostly to the Quran and Hadith, the words of the Apostles of the Prophet and those of some Sûfis. The first volume consists of 187 pages and presents such Sufi concepts and terms such as 'The Origin of Sufism', 'What is Sufism?' 'Who is a Sûfî?' The volume analyses the origins of Sufism in Islam – 'Muhasaba' (Self-Criticism or Self-Interrogation), 'Tafakkur' (Reflection), 'Qalb' (Heart)... with their original names in Arabic to both inform and guide readers and devotees in their lives. Even some controversial terms such as 'Wahdat-i Wucûd', 'Wahdat-i Shuhûd', 'Istighraq' (Immersion) and some ambiguous words (*shathiyyât*) such as 'Anal-Haq' are dealt with.

The volume intends to crystallise key concepts and terms which are fundamental terms of Sufism and originally Islamic terms widely mentioned and frequently referred to in the Quran and Hadith.

The second volume of the series consists of 309 pages and brings out a comprehensive and unique examination of fifty concepts and terms, with an introduction on the heart and some of its dynamics, such as – 'Hurriya' (Freedom), 'Hikma' (Wisdom), 'Wajd and Tawajud' (Ecstasy and Wilful Rapture)...

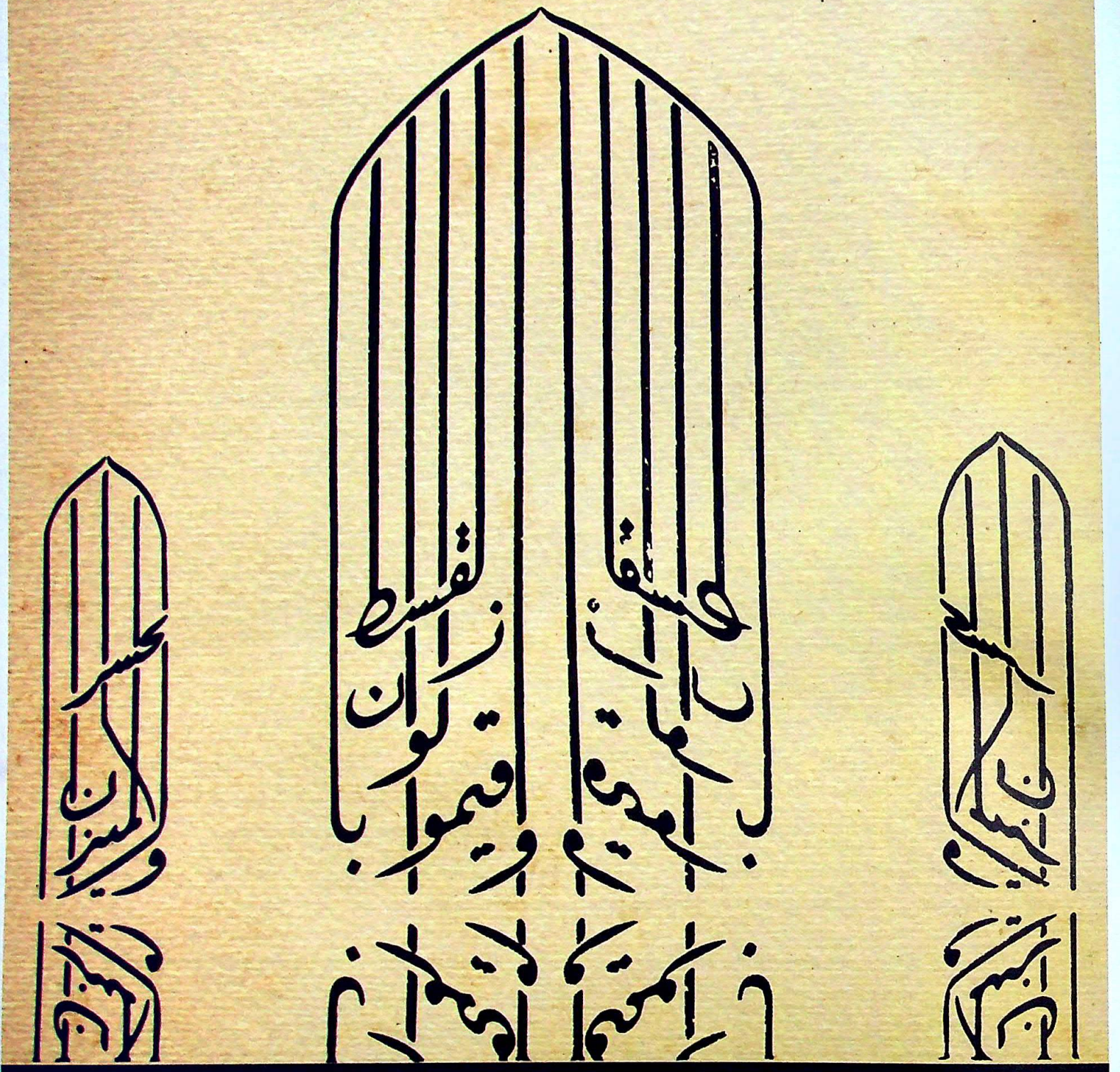
This is a refined and concentrated collection of spiritual knowledge as well as the theoretical and practical assets of Islam from its beginning. It might be called 'mummified Sûfî practice and reflection' with special reference to an eminent Turkish thinker, Cemil Meric's semantic definition of a book: "A Book is a letter sent to the future... an enthusiasm which wore tuxedo, and a mummified reflection."

One of the attractive aspects of this series is the translations by Ali Ünal who is an eminent scholar of Islamic sciences and a very close associate of Gülen.

It seems that this series will be one of the most important reference books, on Sufism, of all times.







HOIMUL WAZNA DIL QISTI  
VAL TUKHRASUL MEEZAN

SET THE STANDARDS WITH EQUITY AND  
DO NOT TRANSGRESS THE BALANCE





*Forsaking all worldly ties, I pinned my unswerving faith in You  
I lost the count of days in your search,  
At length, when I detected your Benign-self in my own limited self  
The distance between you and me was bridged.  
Diversity changed to unity!*

*– Nund Rishi*

*The Sufi Way*

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 **BOEING**



*Forsaking all worldly ties, I pinned my unswerving faith in You*

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*The Sufi Way*

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*I am neither of the East,  
nor of the West  
No boundaries exist in my breast*

---

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